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CALIGULA : DIVINE CARNAGE

BY STEPHEN BARBER

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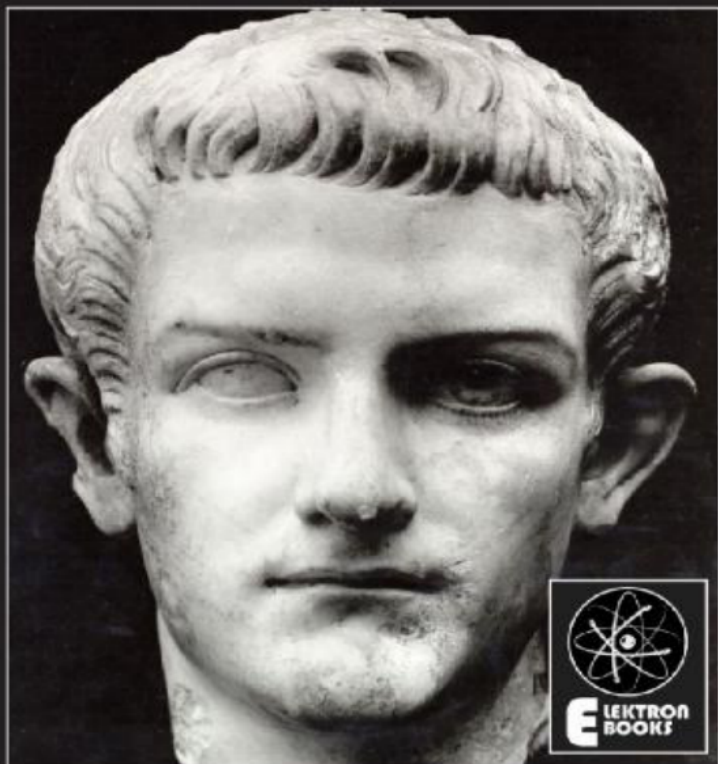
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FOREWORD : ORGY OF DEATH

Ever since the cinematic holocaust of Tinto Brass' blood-splattered porno epic *Caligula* in 1980, connoisseurs of visceral history have thirsted for more information and details on the pleasuredomes and necrodromes of Ancient Rome. Yet the true glories of the Roman Empire – the slaughter, the sexual depravity, the insanity – were virtually impossible to glean from the handful of arid, academic texts available. Finally, here is a book which *counts* – a book which pointedly eschews the mind-numbing minutiae of politico-military history and instead brings the glorious, often shocking decadence of Ancient Rome to bloody, pulsating life.

Here are the incredible cruelties, vices and vanities of emperors such as Caligula and Claudius [see Chapter One], Nero [see Chapter Four], and Commodus [see Chapter Three] in uncensored and vivid relief.

Although Augustus, the first emperor, was a model of decency and restraint, his successor Tiberius (emperor from AD 14–37), notoriously set the tone for imperial debauch in his latter years, when he retired to Capri in around AD 30 [see also Chapter One]. Here, he surrounded himself with young male concubines and indulged in endless orgies of sodomy, cock-sucking and coprophilia. It is reported that the walls of his villa were daubed with vast and complex pornographic friezes which would have shamed de Sade. Not content with enticing mullet to nibble his crumb-coated genitals as he reclined in the tepid rock pools, Tiberius was also in the habit of glazing his penis with milk and honey so that unweaned babes would eagerly suckle at his glans, innocently guzzling the old wretch's torpid emissions.

Yet the excesses and vices of the more infamous tyrants were often matched by lesser known monsters such as Vitellius, whose brief 9-month reign was marked by gluttony, sloth and cowardice and ended in him being hideously tortured and butchered, and then hurled bit by bit into the River Tiber. Vitellius, one of the hundreds of boy prostitutes under Tiberius in Capri, went on to work as courier/catamite for Caligula, Claudius and Nero in turn, and had become emperor by default in AD 69, following the respective decapitation and suicide of Galba and Otho, Nero's transitory successors.[1]

Then there was Domitian, emperor from AD 81–961, who favoured freaks and was always accompanied to the games by a stunted, gibbering pinhead draped in drool-streaked purple robes. Domitian even bought and trained his own legion of achondroplastic dwarf gladiators, who he sent into the arena to combat topless, ferocious

female fighters armed with tridents in grotesque and bloody gavottes of death. Attributed with great phallic power, these dwarfs were watched in naked training by the finest ladies in Rome, who coveted their out-sized generative members.[2]

Domitian meanwhile lusted after prostitutes and courtesans without surcease, and delighted in depilating their succulent pubic mounds by hand-held tweezers before penetration. Rumours of his incest and pederasty abounded. With gleeful hypocrisy he also inflicted awful punishments on the Vestal Virgins, burying the Chief Virgin alive for the sin of fornication and having her lovers horse-whipped to a bloody pulp in the Forum (a tradition upheld by later brutes such as Caracalla [see Chapter Three], who executed four Vestals in this manner during his murderous regime). Domitian also added refinements to the torture of Christians and other fringe cultists, introducing the insertion of burning reeds into the glans penis and localized immolation of the testicles in reprisal for their lunatic heresies.[3] Always in dread of assassination – he even lined the imperial palace with mirrored marble so he could see behind him at all times – he finally inaugurated a vicious, paranoiac pre-emptive killing program in AD 93 that lasted for over two years; senators, officers and family members alike were poisoned or put to sword until Domitian himself was hacked to bloody fragments by conspirators, to be remembered with the same fearful disdain as Tiberius or Caligula by future generations[4].

Yet these purple, gore-tainted snapshots are but a taste of the delights and delirium to follow. Whether your appetite for carnage on a grand scale was whetted by *Caligula*, or even perhaps by the more recent *Gladiator* with its leering depiction of Commodus, in the ensuing pages you will surely find true and lasting satiety.

—James Havoc

NOTES

[1] Vitellius had been succeeded as emperor in AD 69 by Vespasian, who died from a torrential, bowel-shredding diarrhoea attack after drinking tainted spring water, and in AD 79 by the unpopular Titus, a shameless libertine noted only for his nocturnal debauches with catamites and sperm-drinking eunuchs, who also fell foul of disease and expired in a welter of blood-streaked malarial vomit (it is also reported that Domitian, to usher Titus on his way to hell, had his death-bed packed with ice and snow).

[2] Freak culture thrived throughout the centuries of Empire; dwarfs of either sex could be purchased in the Forum Morionium and female hunchbacks, cripples or pinheads were much sought-after as concubines. Magicians and soothsayers would oft cause freaks to be disembowelled alive, divining the future by sifting through many a deformed set of steaming, uncoiling viscera. Augustus, the very first emperor, had a pet dwarf named Lucius, and many of his successors similarly enjoyed the company of human anomalies at imperial court or in their harems. Caligula reputedly gave his slaving retinue of dwarf clowns the absolute power over life and death. It is also reported that the Romans did not hesitate to create and nurture such creatures by brutally contorting, snapping or severing the limbs of infants.

[3] It was Domitian who perpetrated the second major persecution of the Christians, following in the footsteps of Nero who, seeking scapegoats for the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64 – which many believed to have been started by Nero himself in order to clear land for his enormous new palace and grounds, the Golden House – inaugurated the first of many brutal mass purges against this insurgent monotheistic cult. Nero had thousands of them severely tortured, dressed in the skins of wild beasts and finally either torn to shreds by starving mastiffs or tied to stakes and crosses and set on fire while still alive, making screaming human torches to illuminate the streets and arenas of Rome by night.

Although Christians had fallen foul of previous emperors in smaller numbers (Caligula favoured profound facial disfigurement by branding-iron, or sawing in half), a noble pattern for their relentless mass murder was now established, and flourished through subsequent years of Empire marked by such notable peaks of ferocity as the capture and execution of Saint Blandina and her followers in AD 177, at about the time of the accession of the Emperor Commodus. This atrocity occurred at Lyons, where Christians found themselves at odds with the Roman cult of Cybele. In 177 the Christian Easter clashed with the orgiastic Cybeleian rites; it was the perfect excuse for another purge. Blandina and her followers were tracked down, captured, and put to a slow death in the arena over six days. Stripped naked and bound to stakes, the Christians were exposed to the mauling of wild beasts of every description, so that the skin and meat was gradually eaten or clawed away from their bones as they clung to the hideous vestiges of life. Many of these beasts were specially trained to sexually violate and sodomize their prey before dismemberment; female prisoners doused in civet grease were often raped half to death by feral dogs or buggered by baboons beneath the spectators' gaze, before

being duly devoured.

Blandina herself, after a prolonged labial mangling, was hurled into a huge frying-pan of boiling oil and half cooked. Then she was wrapped in a net and thrown before wild bulls; finally, after being trampled and gored to the point of extinction, her throat was cut from ear to ear and her spinal cord severed.

Being eaten alive by hungry wild animals was not the worst fate to befall a Christian, however; other cruelties traditionally inflicted on the Christian “martyrs” included all types of crucifixion, such as being nailed to a cross with arms outstretched or suspended upside-down, where victims were either left to a slow painful death, hacked apart, or burnt alive. Similar to this was impalement by a sharpened stake, usually through the entrails via the rectum. Victims bound to stakes could be pierced by arrows or spears, or have the meat flayed from their living bones by iron claws and spikes. Women would be hung by the hair, and their breasts were often hacked off. Virgins were always raped by their executioner before the kill. Anointing the face or genitals with honey was another method, so the victim would be stung or bitten to death by insects, usually with great lead weights attached to every limb. Hanging by one foot or arm, or even by the thumbs, was also common. Heads were pounded with hammers, kneecaps pulverized, lungs choked by pyres of burning excrement.

Other victims were clamped into wooden barrels, with only head, hands and feet exposed, and force-fed milk and honey, the same mixture being coated over their skin. Tormented by insects on the outside, the victim’s innards would meanwhile erupt with noxious liquid excrement flexing with intestinal worms. Death could take up to two weeks, the wretched Christian’s flesh rotting away in its own filth and devoured by all manner of parasites. A similar fate was to be stitched inside a gutted animal skin, with only head exposed, and left in the blazing sun. The victim’s blood would nearly boil, his or her body gnawed by maggots and gouged by the beaks of vultures.

Christians were also chained to great wooden wheels and their bodies shattered with hammers; they were crushed in great vises; they were torn, ripped and stabbed by rotating metal wheels edged with blades; they were stretched on racks until their limbs ripped away and their innards burst out; they were hung up by manacles or neck-collars and their limbs were dislocated or smashed; they were whipped with flails and cudgels, torn with pincers, hooks and iron claws, skinned alive and roasted in frying-pans or between red-hot iron plates; boiling oil or lead was poured over them, their limbs were chopped off, their genitals were pulped, they were bugged to death with huge, serrated metal dildos; they were stoned, drowned, buried alive, hurled into ravines, or simply beheaded.

Fire was a favourite weapon of torture. Saint Antipas was sealed into a bronze horse and cooked; Saint Euphemia was dismembered and forced to watch her own limbs sizzle in a great pan; Saint Laurence perished on a red-hot griddle; and Saint Cyrilla's belly was slit open, and red-hot coals piled over her entrails. Eyes were burnt out with firebrands, feet cooked in red-hot metal shoes, brains roasted inside burning helmets, flesh seared away from limbs leaving victims to writhe in agony with their charred and smoking bones exposed.

Saint Eucratia had her liver torn out and eaten raw; Saint Prisca was ripped open and her belly stuffed with wild barley to be eaten by hogs; Saint Laurus was eviscerated by a caustic quicklime enema; Saint Febronia had her teeth pulled out and tongue fed to mastiffs; Saint Severus's lips were sliced off and shoved into his anus; and Saint Fausta was pierced with nails then slowly sawn in half, lengthwise, with her vulva as the starting-groove. The list is endless; the tortures inflicted on the Christians were legendary and legion, a catalogue of atrocity only rivalled, perhaps, by the sado-masochistic excesses of the Roman gladiatorial games themselves [see Chapter Two].

[4] The death of Domitian inaugurated a period of nearly one hundred years when the Roman Empire stabilised to a degree, being ruled in turn by the peaceful Nerva, the great soldier Trajan, cultured but eccentric Hadrian, steady and boring Antonius Pius, and then the joint emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (the latter always overshadowed by his co-ruler's military exploits). Then, in AD 180, the madness returned with a vengeance – in the vainglorious form of Commodus.

1. CALIGULA: DIVINE CARNAGE

In the great annals of atrocity, the reign of the Roman emperor Caligula glares out with acetylene brilliance and splendour. Unlike the acts of almost every other autocrat in the black history of mass slaughter, Caligula's tyranny was executed with a supreme deviance and caprice, staged as a vast performance of bestiality, brutality, sexual excess and perversion, for the edification of his largely adoring subjects. The brevity of Caligula's position as the ruler of the known world accentuated the monstrous intensity of his outrages, allowing them to serve as an exemplary inspiration for the infinite acts of atrocity committed by despotic regimes over the following two millennia. But, however hard they tried to emulate him, no subsequent dictator or tyrant has ever succeeded in saturating the institutions of power with indignity and infamy in the way that Caligula did. It was a world-shattering achievement. The nonchalant way in which Caligula planned to irreparably implode the Roman Empire – and, as the icing on the cake, hand the broken pieces on to a drooling cretin – demonstrates the futility and horror of power to its maximal degree. But it was a performance which cost Caligula his life, in a blood-sodden denouement that was his final, and greatest, act.

Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus was born in Anzio, on the Mediterranean coast, on 31 August AD 12. As a child, his father, Germanicus – a celebrated warrior who was a likely contender for the role of emperor – took the child with him on his military campaign against the unruly Teutonic hordes, along the banks of the river Rhine. It was there, in the brutish camps of the Roman legions, where buggery ruled supreme, that the boy was given his affectionate nickname, “Caligula” – “Little Boots” – after the military-style footwear which he had to wear in the perpetually muddy conditions of the sordid camps. The nickname stuck, even though Caligula detested it, and he would ironically pass into history with an anodyne soubriquet which was the utter contradiction of the lethal devastation that he unleashed upon the Roman world and its enemies, and ultimately upon himself.

Caligula's childhood saw an entire catalogue of murders, exiles and bestial humiliations inflicted on those around him. Almost every member of his family had been surreptitiously murdered or tortured into extinction by the time he became emperor. Although he would become only the third of the Julio-Claudian emperors, the dynasty was already tainted with an indelible malediction by the time of Caligula's accession, and had definitively run aground in a morass of

corruption, incest, child sex and mass executions.

Although the first Julio-Claudian emperor, Augustus, was still alive at the time of Caligula's birth, he expired two years later and was succeeded by his adopted son, Tiberius, who was already elderly.

Although Tiberius proved to be an adept administrator and military planner, the Empire veered off into disarray under his rule. Tiberius preferred to reign from outside Rome, since he loathed the plebeian scum of the city with absolute ferocity. Although his own life was marked by excess and deviance – he was a sexual pervert of the highest order, who refined sophisticated mixtures of butchery and lust within the confines of his lavish palaces – Tiberius preferred to appear as an austere autocrat to his subjects, and rationed their own pleasures rigorously. The plebeian scum of Rome lived for the ecstatic sensations of the arena and the spectacles of gladiatorial slaughter which were staged there. Tiberius reduced the number of great festivals in the arena to an absolute minimum, and almost never took his assigned place to watch the slaughter along with his subjects. As a result, he was detested. For the last decade of his reign, Tiberius mainly lived in his palace on the island of Capri, off the Mediterranean coast, where he could simultaneously be protected from assassination by the plebeian multitude or by other enemies of his icy power, and also pursue his old man's obsessions with the laceration and multiple penetration of youthful sexual organs.

Tiberius arranged for the poisoning and murders of Caligula's father and two brothers, and exiled his mother to a remote island where she committed suicide in despair. All of those deaths formed part of the intricate power regime instituted by Tiberius, conceived in order to annihilate threats to his imperial status (Caligula's father Germanicus had been far more popular than Tiberius) and to try to arrange the future of the Empire in his own image. But he overdid his campaigns of slaughter, to the point where only Caligula – who, without those multiple murders, would never have become a contender for emperor – and Tiberius's young grandson Gemellus survived from the near-decimated Julio-Claudian dynasty. The only other, and much more remote, contender was the hapless cretin Claudius, Caligula's uncle, whom the family had always tried to hide from public view. Caligula was an excitable and vindictive child, who was psychotically inclined from birth and subsequently traumatized still further by the executions of the male members of his family. He became increasingly attached to his three sisters, especially the beautiful Drusilla, three years younger than himself; although Caligula committed incest with all of his sisters, it was Drusilla, then fourteen years of age, who became the primary focus of Caligula's sexual obsession. The four children were shifted around from one house to

another in Rome, and for years on end, their fearful lives hung in the balance, subject to the least whim of Tiberius's deadly schemes. Caligula and Drusilla relentlessly expanded their sexual repertoire in an atmosphere of fear which added an edge of desperation to their heated incestuous experiments: they knew that they could be snuffed out at any moment, and copulated in a three-year-long frenzy of non-stop lust, almost never leaving their bedroom. But, when Caligula was nineteen years of age, Tiberius finally came to the reluctant conclusion that, because of his own backfired schemes of murderous overkill, the volatile youth had unexpectedly become the prize contestant to succeed him as emperor, and so he ordered Caligula to join him on Capri, in order to attempt to mould him with his own harsh vision of the Empire and of the pre-eminent value of rampant sexual excess.

By the time that Caligula was shipped out to Capri, the decrepit Tiberius had descended into a state of increasingly senile lust. Newly-discovered inscriptions from the ruins of his palace there record his fondness for participating in a triple anal penetration, and his demand that every inhabitant of the palace had to bow down each morning in subjugation before the majesty of his diseased, blackened sexual organ. At the same time, he kept the Empire under an iron rod, executing any provincial governors who failed to follow his orders to the letter, and restricting the behaviour of the Empire's millions of inhabitants with rigid edicts. He combined lecherous extravagance with grim austerity, and an almost scientific engagement with expanding the limits of the sexual act. For five years, Caligula had to participate incessantly in all of the emperor's spectacular forays into sexual research, which entailed such pioneering work as mile-long chains of buggery, experiments into the moment when orgasm transformed itself into death (many thousands of young male slaves were strangled or decapitated at the precise moment of ejaculation), and the maximum capacity of the anal aperture. Tiberius recorded all of his discoveries in an autobiography which was believed lost until recently; he planned that when his research had been completed, he would compel every inhabitant of the Empire to spend one hundred per cent of their time emulating the experiments he had devised, so that the known world would finally obliterate itself in one great explosive detonation of semen and severed body parts. Witness to mass torture and execution by day and debased in unspeakable orgies by night, Caligula had no option but to wholeheartedly take part in Tiberius's grand schemes, and gradually came to view them as the natural course of events. He also had to combat his revulsion for Tiberius as the murderer of his family, and to constantly praise and flatter him, although the dour and fast-rotting emperor disdained any

idea that he should be worshipped as a god. Tiberius grew tolerant of Caligula and gave him fatherly advice, but it was always limited to the subjects of bestiality, buggery and thrift.

Mercifully, Tiberius was reaching the end of his reign, although he astonished his entourage on several occasions by appearing to expire, before suddenly resuscitating himself and berating those around him for being too quick to think he had perished. Finally though, on 16 March AD 37, he performed this exasperating trick once too often, and one of his own senior bodyguards, a praetorian commander named Macro, lost his temper and throttled the leering emperor with his own sperm-soiled bedsheets. Although Tiberius's last wish had been that one of his most well-endowed slaves should bugger his corpse, nobody prepared to do so could be found, despite considerable financial incentives. For a while, the imperial succession hovered between Caligula and Tiberius's young grandson Gemellus, and a plan was suggested that they should both become joint-emperors. But Macro allied himself with Caligula, and they managed to side-line Gemellus, eventually murdering the youth by taking turns to ram a white-hot poker up his anus. Macro wanted to be the power behind Caligula and to make him a puppet for his own aspirations, and he began to give Caligula overbearing instructions on how he should behave in public, including a prohibition on Caligula committing incest with Drusilla within the public gaze. Although Caligula owed his accession largely to Macro, he had no intention of substituting one bogus father with another, and Macro soon got his come-uppance, ordered to commit suicide with one sneering remark from Caligula: "*tolmai tis didaskein?*" – "Who dares to command me?" Caligula had finally been liberated from the terror of imminent execution which had haunted his early years, and also from his enforced participation on Capri in Tiberius's grandiose displays of sexual deviancy. On 28 March AD 37, Caligula was given absolute imperial power by the Roman Senate. Now, master of the Empire, he could bugger the entire population of the world if he wanted to.

Caligula soon discovered that Tiberius had been so avaricious and tight-fisted that, over his reign, he had accumulated more money than could be calculated under the Roman numerical system. The coffers of the Empire were bulging, and Caligula set about spending with a vengeance. He won over to him the plebeian scum of Rome by luxuriantly renovating the arena and staging more spectacular gladiatorial combats than they had ever seen. The arena became the primary focus of Rome: its solid-gold, solar anus.

Caligula vastly increased the number of games staged in the arena, and made sure that he never neglected to be present for the most prestigious and blood-sodden gladiatorial combats. The massed

plebeian hordes remembered Caligula's father, Germanicus, with great affection, and they went into a frenzy of adulatory ecstasy on hearing that Caligula had succeeded the detested Tiberius. They also adored Caligula because he was a visible presence in the filthy backstreets of Rome, often to be seen carried about in a litter with Drusilla by his side, energetically masturbating with one hand while distributing golden coins with the other; the plebeian scum elbowed and crushed one another into the dust in order to simultaneously catch the spurting imperial semen in their mouths and the coins in their hands. They shouted out to Caligula, trying to catch his attention, calling him their "star" and their "little chick".

Another way in which Caligula performed the extraordinary feat of totally emptying the imperial coffers in the first year of his reign was by commissioning a mass ritual human and bestial slaughter, to mark his glorious ascension to imperial status: criminals from throughout the Empire were brought to Rome to be massacred in the arenas and temples of the city, their ranks supplemented by innumerable, expendable slaves and by a scattering of attractive citizens who had caught Caligula's eye on his rounds of the city. In all, nearly two hundred thousand animals were also sacrificed; Caligula maintained the vast network of hunters which had been established to collect and transport these animals, in order to provide the arena in the future with a constant supply of lions, bears and other beasts from every corner of the Empire, which were used in the decimation of its dissident elements and other enemies, such as religious cultists and magicians. Already, Caligula considered that he owed it to the adoring plebeian scum to become a god, and the sacrifices at the beginning of his reign formed the first stage in his process of self-deification.

Caligula was also ready to pour away the Empire's wealth into schemes for territorial expansion. The four corners of Caligula's empire stretched from Egypt to Tingitana to the English Channel to the river Rhine: this expanse constituted almost the entirety of the known world, and certainly all of those areas which were viewed by the Romans as being remotely civilized. Beyond the boundaries of the Empire lay the forbidding territories of Britain and Germany, whose inhabitants grouped into morose tribes of ferocious warriors and incessantly pillaged their own dank and forested lands. Even so, Caligula had his eye on the conquest of Britain and Germany: the definitive subjugation of the wild Teutonic hordes had been his father Germanicus's great ambition, and Caligula inherited the desire to extend the territory of the Empire northwards. Since Caligula's own early years had been spent among the dung-reeking encampments of the brutal Roman legions, while his father vainly attempted to subdue the boorish Teutons, he was drawn to the prospect of securing glory

for himself by masterminding a final victory over the edge of those northern frontiers. This ambition was coupled with a deep distrust and hatred of the Roman soldiers themselves, since a motley group of them had mutinied when he was a two-year-old child, and had briefly held him hostage in one of the legions' innumerable camps on the Rhine frontier, before the rebellion ended in a bloodbath of retribution. In addition to Britain and Germany, Caligula also had envious designs on the areas beyond the eastern frontier of the Empire, where the fabulously wealthy rulers of weird kingdoms were worshipped as deities by their subjects.

At first, Caligula managed to captivate the aristocratic members of the Senate which nominally governed Rome, as well as the plebeian detritus which swarmed around its streets. Caligula cut a striking figure in his first appearances as emperor before the gathered Senate, which had spent the weeks between Tiberius's death and Caligula's accession in formulating servile tributes to the new emperor. It had fawningly given absolute power to Caligula, thereby effectively annulling itself. Caligula enjoyed making public speeches, especially to such a receptive audience, although his excitable temperament meant that he would quickly become carried away into a gibbering and inarticulate frenzy, spouting saliva in every direction. In his first meetings with the Senate, Caligula made a show of listening to their advice and promising to rule wisely, and he created a favourable impression. The members of the Senate saw before them a tall, heavily built young man of twenty-four, with a strangely elongated forehead that was deeply indented with piercing, manic eyes. From his long years spent perpetually indoors, taking part in Tiberius's sexual experiments on Capri, Caligula's complexion had become intensely pallid; he suffered from chronic insomnia and emanated an aura of restless fatigue, and he always sucked his lower lip under his upper teeth. He appeared ungainly, his hefty torso poised on spindly legs. But, in contrast with the addled and leering figure of the aged Tiberius, who had leaked sexual fluids and booming flatulence with every step, the Senate optimistically viewed Caligula as the epitome of moderation and youthful vigour.

The sight of the more-or-less coherent and sentient young Caligula was a relief to them, since at that point, he was expected to reign for the next fifty to sixty years. However, by the end of his reign, under four years later, Caligula would have finalized plans to massacre the entire Senate and destroy its meeting hall, and it was only through an ultimate mischance that the gang of pompous sycophants survived.

But for the moment, the senators took turns in delivering grovelling speeches in which every part of Caligula's majestic anatomy was exalted.

Caligula spent the first months of his reign engaged almost entirely in incestuous copulation with his sister Drusilla. Now that nobody could tell him what to do, he was avid to flaunt his attachment to Drusilla to the maximum degree in public, and a special, miniature amphitheatre was erected where the plebeian scum could, for a small fee, sit and watch their emperor bugger his sister on a stage of solid gold. Drusilla was an active participant in these spectacles, matching her older brother in deviance, and Caligula made it clear that, on the rare occasions when they resorted to vaginal sex, he intended that they would produce a male child, born of rampant incest, who would become the legitimate heir to the Empire. But on most occasions, the crowd would roar with uncontainable ecstasy as Caligula rammed his foot-long rod of imperial *mortadella* into Drusilla's initially resistant, then deeply welcoming anus; simultaneously, Caligula's favourite gladiator, Superbus, from the mountains of eastern Tingitana, would brandish his rigid packet of fourteen-inch *merguez* between both fists and then force it into the emperor's excruciatingly pulsing rectum. Caligula regularly hired well-known professional studs from every corner of the Empire to take part in these public sessions, and also occasionally brought in a few hideously deformed freaks and dwarfs to add a frisson to the proceedings. He enlisted the services of the more well-endowed senators, who were initially delighted to bask in the radiant glare of Caligula's imperial lust. In any case, they had nothing better to do, since now that they had given Caligula absolute power, they had no laws to make and spent all their time discussing what colours the Senate's meeting hall should be redecorated in.

Soon, however, the senators had been tired out by the inexorable sessions of copulation, which were interrupted only when Caligula left the sexual amphitheatre to go and watch the gladiatorial atrocities and other blood-sodden massacres in the nearby arena. One of the most well-endowed senators, Valerius Catallus, famously commented that he had been forced to bugger the emperor so often that he had totally worn himself out in doing so. The professional studs, on the other hand, just kept on pumping. Not all of the plebeian scum of Rome approved of Caligula's public incest, and dark mutterings were heard from the city's magicians and oracles that such outrages would bring the wrath of the gods down on the Empire. The magicians employed "curse tablets" – small blocks of lead, smeared with blood and ashes, into which hostile incantations were scratched – against Caligula. The followers of the innumerable clandestine religious cults whispered that the mouth of hell would open up and swallow Caligula into its fiery bowels. Fortunately, Caligula possessed an extensive network of spies and eavesdroppers, and the magicians and cultists invariably found themselves in the arena, minus their heads, thereby

bringing a convenient end to their gloomy predictions and vitriolic curses.

After five months of unremitting carnal depravity, Caligula suddenly fell ill, and hovered close to death in a delirious state of fever for nearly four weeks. His doctors feared the worst, and contenders for the succession began to jockey for position, pushing one another out of the way so that they could rip the great imperial ring from Caligula's finger at the moment he expired. Since Caligula had no clear heir, the succession would have to be decided by a violent power struggle. The fever went on, and Caligula's face became covered with streaming orange pustules. The odour of death seeped through the palace. The plebeian detritus gathered at the palace gates, wailing; in the first months of Caligula's reign, they had experienced the most luminescent moment in the entire history of Rome, and feared that it was now to be snatched from them. But Caligula was strong, and he eventually pulled through. On awakening, the first sound he heard was the voice of an obsequious senator declaring that he was ready to give up his own life if Caligula could survive; the emperor immediately took up his offer and ordered him to be killed on the spot. He then demanded a list of all of those who had eagerly anticipated his death, and had them tortured and slaughtered without compunction. Their severed heads were piled up on his bed, where he lay recovering his strength. Then, as soon as he could stand upright, he raided the last treasure chests left over from Tiberius's surplus, and threw seventy thousand golden coins to the rejoicing plebeian masses that had gathered beneath the palace's balconies. After his recovery, Caligula decided that now, he would only ever die when he himself wanted to, and, if it suited him, he would simply not die at all. His self-deification was drawing ever nearer.

Two of Caligula's three sisters had been involved in the unseemly squabbling for power that had gone on while the emperor was in his delirious coma; Drusilla had been the sole sister to have actively hoped for her brother's recovery, and this only deepened Caligula's attachment to her. The guilty sisters, Agrippina and Livilla, were the only conspirators not to be slowly minced and then decapitated; Caligula reflected on his sisters' punishment, and then turned them over to the crowd. He decreed that every member of Rome's plebeian scum, down to the lepers and the freaks, had the right to demand whatever deviant sexual act they desired from the sisters for a period of five days. A special marquee was erected in front of Caligula's palace, and the emperor himself made occasional visits to see how the event was progressing, although he quickly re-established his own rigorous schedule of public incest and buggery, coupled with frequent visits to the gladiatorial arena. An imperial commission stood by the

stage where the action was taking place, fully documenting each sexual demand made by the plebeian detritus and the time it took for Caligula's sisters to satisfy it. When the five days were up, Caligula went to the marquee to see his dishevelled but still spirited sisters. He told them that because they had stood up so well to mass copulation on a grand scale (seven thousand deviant sexual acts in one hundred and twenty hours: an impressive average rate of over fifty sex acts per hour), he had indulgently decided to spare their lives; instead, he would exile them to the remote Pontian islands. However, Agrippina was seven months' pregnant at the time, and Caligula permitted her to remain in Rome until after she had given birth, on 15 December AD 37. At first, Caligula mischievously ordered that she had to name the child after his drooling cretin of an uncle, Claudius; but he then relented, and allowed her to choose whatever name she wanted. Agrippina's child would bear the name of one of the few emperors ever to remotely rival Caligula in the sheer intensity of his grandiose and arbitrary slaughter: Nero.

Meanwhile, the Empire was functioning smoothly, except for its rapidly diminishing treasury. Caligula had won over most of Rome's philosophers at the outset of his reign by announcing a regime of total freedom of expression; Tiberius had instigated a policy of rigorous censorship and prohibition on what could be said and published in the Empire. The philosophers were nonplussed, however, when they discovered that they were now expected, on pain of death, to devote their newfound freedom entirely to composing essays and speeches extolling Caligula's libertarian policies: any philosopher who broached another subject would instantly have his hands chopped off and his mouth sewn up. In another liberal move, Caligula freed all of the Empire's political prisoners. But in almost all cases, the prisoners were far too exhausted by years of torture and malnutrition to celebrate their release, and so Caligula then had them immediately re-arrested for the crime of ingratitude; they were transported to Rome, without exception, to serve as fodder for the carnage of the arena. Caligula's innovative policies followed a dual regime of freedom and slaughter, with the latter intractably succeeding the former. In matters of the government of the Empire, Caligula found that he had very little time available to devote to administration, once he had fulfilled his onerous duties to buggery. He therefore conceived a policy in which, whatever problem came up in any part of the Empire, he would take no action whatsoever. He believed that, in every instance, it was better not to interfere, and eventually matters would sort themselves out of their own accord. Because the dour Tiberius had instituted a highly efficient and incorruptible system of administration for the Empire before he decided to dedicate his time to wholesale debauchery on Capri,

everything did in fact continue to run smoothly during Caligula's inactive regime. Whenever anxious deputations arrived at the palace from the unruly provinces of the Empire, notably Judea and Egypt, Caligula would smile benignly at the delegates and tell them to enjoy themselves in Rome while he considered their problems; the delegates then invariably became caught up in the furore of the arena or in the public spectacles of copulation, and quickly forgot about whatever matters had seemed so urgent to them when they had first arrived in the city. The Empire continued to operate at full tilt, although Caligula knew that the previously-groaning imperial coffers bequeathed to him by Tiberius were now empty, and he would need to come up with some new wealth-generating schemes before too long.

Overall, the first year of Caligula's reign had been a blistering success: the plebeian scum were in ecstasy at the regime of atrocity and sexual spectacle which their emperor unstintingly provided for them; the Senate now had endless free time to enjoy, and the philosophers had been granted complete liberty of expression. It appeared that Caligula's reign would be the pinnacle of Roman civilization in every field, and that it would continue for many more decades. But then, without warning, everything fell apart. On 10 June AD 38, Drusilla suddenly died, at the age of twenty-three. The doctors diagnosed "a surfeit of buggery". She had just concluded a non-stop twenty-hour session with her brother and seven outrageously well-endowed studs who had recently arrived from the province of western Caesariensis, the conclusion of which had been a near-apocalyptic collective orgasm whose devastating celebroid implications had sadly proved terminal for Drusilla.

Even after her face turned bright blue and *rigor mortis* set in, Caligula kept on berating the doctors and instructing them to resuscitate his sister. His screams of anguish rang throughout the city. The only solution now was to transform Drusilla into a god; after thoroughly sodomizing his sister's icy body for the final time, Caligula quickly set to work issuing edicts and proclamations.

Within a few weeks, every district of Rome had a temple devoted to Drusilla's deification, and statues of the new goddess appeared all over the Empire, from the greatest cities to the smallest hamlets. The human Drusilla now became the god Panthea – a name which indicated that, in her deified splendour, she both encompassed and surpassed all of the other gods.

Although the plebeian scum of Rome were happy to accept that Drusilla was now a god (her deification was marked by a spectacular set of gladiatorial games in the arena), the members of the Senate and the city's philosophers opposed Caligula's edicts, on the grounds that

only outstanding emperors, such as Augustus, had the right to become gods. This obstinacy drove Caligula into a psychotic frenzy of unparalleled proportions. The blubbering philosophers had their tongues pulled out, and were then dispatched to the arena to be publicly crucified upside-down while being burnt alive; the recalcitrant senators, too, fell victim to Caligula's near-divine wrath. In front of the emperor's eyes, their executioner slit open each senator's stomach with a skinning knife and then gradually extracted his internal organs with white-hot scissors and pliers, making sure that the removal of the organs occurred in such a sequence that the senator remained aware of what was happening to him for the longest possible duration; then, when a steaming heap of his own reeking internal organs had gathered in full view of the senator's horrified eyes, the executioner was instructed by Caligula to finish him off, by gradually sawing apart the screaming senator's body, until it slumped to the ground in two blood-spurting pieces.

Caligula famously ordered the senators' executioners: "Strike so that they may feel that they are dying." And rather than rescinding the posthumous deification of Drusilla, Caligula decided that he himself would soon join her as a deity, and that he would certainly not have to die before it happened.

In the months after Drusilla's death, Caligula journeyed south, to Naples and then Sicily, trying to distract himself. He took with him the cremated ashes of his sister in a tubular golden urn, and would often open up the urn and thrust his imperial weapon into the powdered debris of grey bone shards, desperately trying to resuscitate his sister with his regal semen. But the failure of this strategy only increased his sense of psychotic desolation, and he concluded that it was now time for him to create the foundations for a great dynasty of incest, perversion and slaughter, that would rule the world for many millennia. In deciding on a choice of sexual partner for this magnificent project, Caligula hovered for a while between his favourite horse, Incitatus, and a human contender named Caesonia, who had the reputation of being the most lascivious woman in Rome. In the end, Caligula decided on Caesonia, and after some lengthy sessions of vaginal intercourse (a novelty for Caligula), she soon became pregnant. The emperor compensated the disappointed Incitatus by giving the horse considerable decision-making political power over the entire Empire, as well as by constructing a massive new stable of marble and silver, encrusted with diamonds; he also gave Incitatus a place of honour at all his banquets, and included the horse's name in every sentence he spoke.

But Incitatus remained inconsolable. Then, in April AD 39, Caligula married Caesonia, and in the following month she gave birth

to a baby girl with a savage temper, whom Caligula naturally named Drusilla. The first stage in his great plan for a lunatic dynasty of incest had come to fruition, although Caligula realised with exasperation that he would now have to wait for a few years before he could inseminate the reincarnated Drusilla and produce a rightful heir for the Empire.

In order to consolidate the glory of his new dynasty, Caligula decided that some unprecedented public spectacles and spectacular military triumphs would be in order. The first of these grandiose events was the spanning of the Bay of Naples, in July AD 39, by a immensely long arc of boats. This intricate feat, known as the “bridge of Baiae”, was executed on the emperor’s instructions by many thousands of engineers, aided by a multitude of slaves. The bridge, made from commandeered merchant ships that had been bound together in a double line, was paved over with a flat road of marble able to carry the weight of many chariots. Caligula dispatched a gang of grave-robbers to plunder the tomb of Alexander the Great in Egypt, and they brought back the breastplate which Alexander had worn in all of his great victories against Asian despots. The plebeian scum of the whole of southern Italy were herded to the bay, where they cheered in adulation at the appearance of Caligula, wearing the legendary breastplate under a cloak of purple cloth that was embedded with chunks of gold and precious gems. Caligula rode from one end to the other of the bridge as the watching crowd whipped itself into a cacophonous frenzy. On the second day of the spectacle, Caligula drove out on a chariot to the centre of the bridge, followed by a dazzling procession of thousands of his most trusted bodyguards. Caligula had with him the young son of the King of Parthia, who had been captured and brought to Rome as a hostage; the subjugated presence of the tyrant’s son served to demonstrate Caligula’s ascendancy over all of the bestial Asian hordes which posed a perpetual danger to the Empire’s eastern frontier. Caligula climbed onto a splendid platform raised over the bridge and addressed the plebeian masses on the shoreline, praising his own extravagance. Although his speech rapidly degenerated into saliva-spouting incoherence, the entranced millions of plebeian scum barked out their reverence for Caligula’s pearls of wisdom.

Finally, on the second night, the spectacle ended with a great celebration, illuminated by a series of huge pyres which flamed from the cliffs around the bay, turning night to day. Caligula announced that even the plebeian masses had the right to participate in the alcohol-fired celebration, although when too many of them climbed onto the bridge at the same time, part of it collapsed under their weight and many thousands drowned, elated to their last breath.

Undeterred by the fatalities, Caligula began to plan his next great spectacles: the decimation of the brutish Teutonic military forces, to be followed by the conquest of murky Britain.

In early September AD 39, two months after bridging the Bay of Naples, Caligula set out at the head of a colossal army of a quarter of a million soldiers, heading for the city of Mainz on the river Rhine: the centre of all Roman military operations against the Teutonic hordes. Caligula travelled surrounded by a thousand of his elite bodyguards, and the army stretched out for several miles behind them. After the legions, a further army of camp-followers – many thousands of male and female prostitutes, cooks, actors and entertainers of all kinds – followed on. Caesonia and the five-month-old Drusilla, together with a wagonload of well-endowed, attractive slaves exclusively assigned to service the emperor's sexual caprices, also accompanied the vast procession. In all, a travelling city of over half a million people scorched its way northwards, squeezing dry every place it passed through for provisions before leaving it flattened and smouldering. Each night, the legionnaires would gather around immense campfires and sing ominous songs. For the initial stages of the journey, Caligula rode along on horseback, constantly whipping his legions onwards, so that the convoy moved at a breakneck pace. But then, the emperor grew tired of riding and had to be carried by eight sturdy legionnaires, on a litter of swansdown.

Throughout the long journey, Caligula amused himself by taking potshots at the dull-witted peasants in the roadside fields, wielding a sort of projectile-shooting bazooka which had been specially designed for him by his engineers. Even from long range, Caligula could nonchalantly take the head off a gormless peasant with one shot. Peasants had a pitifully low rank in the regime of the Roman Empire, which was intended to benefit urban centres and their inhabitants rather than rural workers; peasants figured somewhere between dogs and swine in the priorities of the Empire.

After a journey of forty days, Caligula arrived at the river Rhine. The commanders of the legions stationed there were astounded to see the approaching army, headed by the emperor in person; some of the older legionnaires remembered Caligula from when he had been taken to the Rhine bases as a small child by his father, the ever-popular Germanicus, and they feebly cheered his arrival. The struggle with the Teutonic savages had been going on for many decades already, punctuated by occasional crossings of the Rhine by the legions and ferocious battles with the bearded and godless Teutons, notably the savage Chatti tribe. Exactly thirty years previously, three of the Roman legions had been completely obliterated in the legendary Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, the aftermath of which had seen the

entrails of over seventy thousand Roman soldiers hanging from the branches of that dank forest's trees; the boorish Teutons had sliced off and pickled the massacred legionnaires' testicles, and had only finished eating them in the previous year. It was a defeat that still cast a heavy pall over the entire Empire, and Caligula was determined to avenge it. Over the subsequent decades, the brutish Roman legions stationed at the Rhine had grown increasingly mutinous and uncontrollable, while their commanders had almost given up on defeating the untameable Teutonic hordes and had lapsed into weary lassitude and corruption.

Caligula ordered the executions of the most inept commanders and made fresh appointments from among his entourage, although the new commanders proved to be just as incompetent as the previous ones. He also gave stirring speeches to the Rhine legions, but they had all been marooned out in those bestial provinces for far too long, and simply stared back at the gesticulating, saliva-spouting Caligula with vacant expressions. The wild Teutons had heard that the Roman emperor himself was there, and thousands of them gathered on the river's far bank to chant abuse at Caligula and to make obscene gestures.

Caligula was discouraged by the surly behaviour of the near-mutinous legions in that infernal backwater, and was already regretting his decision to launch the campaign; he missed the hysterical adulation which he received in Rome from his plebeian scum, together with the constant supply of atrocity and high-calibre buggery he had access to there. But he was still determined to execute a spectacular triumph against the Teutonic savages that would serve to saturate his reign with glory. Although it was clearly too dangerous for him to stage a battle against the invincible Teutons using only the loyal troops he had brought with him from Rome, he devised an ingenious alternative strategy. Some of his own bodyguards were of German origin, so Caligula arranged for twenty of them to be dressed up in the woolly costumes favoured by the devilish Teutons, and ordered them to hide in a nearby wood; he then raced after them with his army of two hundred and fifty thousand men, and courageously captured them. On returning to the legions' camp, the prisoners swore oaths of allegiance in German to Caligula and debased themselves by kissing his boots, before being summarily slaughtered. News of Caligula's great triumph was urgently sent back to Rome, although the disabused Rhine legions simply rolled their mutinous eyes.

After his magnificent victory on the Rhine, Caligula headed west, arriving at the city of Lyons, in the backward province of Gaul, at the end of October AD 39. He intended to rest for the winter in that relatively-salubrious city, before launching his great invasion of

Britain. At this point, the imperial treasury had reached rock-bottom, and Caligula knew that he would have to generate some substantial new funds. The wealthy inhabitants of Lyons were enthralled to have the Roman emperor himself staying in their provincial city, and they had money to burn. Caligula hit upon the brilliant idea of selling his excrement to them for the same price as its weight in gold. The Roman governor of Gaul had been expelled from his palace in Lyons to make room for the emperor, and Caligula spent his first months in the palace engaged in eating enormous portions of *polenta* in order to generate the material that would ensure a maximum revenue (even today, in rural northern Italy, a large portion of *polenta* is called a

“Caligula”). He discovered that there was no shortage of takers, and the wealthy, starstruck provincials eagerly lined up outside the palace to make their purchases of his near-divine imperial excrement, which was canned in little brass containers that added to its weight. Soon, the Empire’s coffers were starting to bulge again.

Caligula realised that the unsophisticated provincials would literally buy anything at all with an imperial aura; to satisfy the demand, he had his exiled sisters’ possessions brought to Lyons and personally auctioned them off at a series of public sales. He cajoled the avid buyers, and protested that they were snapping up the imperial possessions at such low prices that it was daylight robbery. When his sisters’ possessions had all been bought, Caligula ordered that everything which had belonged to the deceased emperors Tiberius and Augustus should also now be dispatched to Lyons, on a mule train that stretched non-stop between the two cities. The auctions’ takings flooded the palace and poured out of the windows; Caligula had to live in one small room, since every other space in the palace was filled up with bloated treasure chests. One evening, while Caligula was gambling with his cronies, he suddenly left the room and ordered that a list be drawn up of the hundred most wealthy families in Gaul; he then commanded that every member of the families should be immediately slaughtered, since if someone died without an heir in the Roman Empire, their entire inheritance passed directly to the emperor himself. He then returned to the gambling table, and taunted his cronies by telling them that while they had been busy gambling for a few pennies, he had just netted a fortune in the space of five minutes. The money poured in. Apart from using some of it to build a monumental statue to his deified sister in the main square of Lyons, Caligula hoarded all of the rest; he had the swollen treasure chests loaded onto wagons and added to his army’s convoy. By the first months of AD 40, Caligula had completely bled the city and the whole of Gaul dry, and even the gullible provincials were getting restive and starting to demand their money back; the emperor then abruptly left

Lyons with his army, and headed for the coast of the English Channel.

In March AD 40, at Boulogne, Caligula gazed out over the narrow expanse of rough sea towards Britain. The Senate in Rome had already sent him a letter acclaiming him as “Britannicus”, the conqueror of Britain, so his imminent victory over the gloomy island was a foregone conclusion. The white cliffs could be made out on the far side, shrouded in mist and thunderclouds, and topped by great lines of gesticulating human figures, brandishing enormous axes; their rumbling curses could be heard even on the Gaul side of the Channel. Caligula then came up with the most ambitious and innovative plan of his entire reign. He decided that his legions should split into two halves and then furiously decimate one another, leaving no survivors whatsoever; this mass carnage would so terrify the Britons that they would immediately surrender their island to Caligula. But, when Caligula excitedly announced his plan in a speech to the massed legions, he discovered to his astonishment that they were unreceptive to their own annihilation. Before long, though, he had formulated an alternative plan, which was just as brilliant. He stood on a specially-erected platform of solid gold and barked out his orders, commanding all of the soldiers to collect as many seashells as they could carry from the beach; once the shells had been gathered into jute sacks, Caligula would take them back to Rome as the spoils of his conquest, with each shell representing an enslaved Briton. He would then return at some nebulous point in the future to actually undertake the mundane business of putting the primitive British hordes into chains and delivering them for slaughter in the Roman arena. The soldiers enthusiastically filled up the sacks, preferring this idea to that of their own collective extinction, and the brimful sacks of shells were added to Caligula’s endless baggage train. With his great mission fulfilled, the emperor now ordered his army to form up for their triumphant return to Rome, and they soon headed off, leaving the glowering Britons still hurling black maledictions from their own side of the Channel.

As Caligula approached Rome in May AD 40, the plebeian scum surged out of the city in one delirious throng to welcome him back. He immediately ordered that the greatest games of gladiatorial combat and mass atrocity in the history of Rome be organized to celebrate his magnificent victories. The three-month-long games, in which untold thousands of criminals, magicians and dissidents of every kind would be slaughtered, proved so expensive that they consumed almost the entirety of the money which Caligula had extorted from the citizens of Gaul. But, for Caligula, it was worth it.

The plebeian masses pleaded with Caligula not to leave Rome again, since during his absence they had been subjected to numerous

restrictions and prohibitions on their behaviour by the Senate, which had been trying to claw back its power. And on his return journey to Rome, the emperor had himself been constantly fulminating against the Senate, since they had committed the grave error of not sending him sufficient congratulations for his unprecedented feats of courage and brilliance beside the English Channel. To add insult to injury, they had dispatched to Gaul his drooling freak of an uncle, Claudius, to deliver their restrained acclaim; the furious Caligula had lifted the slobbering cretin into his arms and thrown him headfirst into a sewer, from which he emerged caked in reeking liquid dung. Now, Caligula was thinking of massacring the entire Senate; he slapped the blade of his imperial sword in the flat of his hand, and yelled in the direction of the Senate's meeting hall: "I'm on my way, and so is this!" On his return journey, he had carefully filled two notebooks with a hit-list of the senators' names, titling one notebook "Sword" and the other "Dagger". He was also planning to use exactly the same murderous income-generating strategies on the wealthy families of Rome which he had successfully employed in Gaul.

But above all, Caligula had decided that it was now time for his own deification. He spent the entire summer of AD 40 in one of his many lavish villas outside Rome, rigorously preparing to be a god. He sent for the most adept magicians from every corner of the Empire, and they spent several weeks in a darkened room with Caligula, revealing every last secret of their art to him. In a final ceremony, they formed a circle around the emperor and, incanting strange invocations in many tongues, they infused his naked body with all of their arcane powers, so that it radiated golden jets of fire from every orifice. After that, Caligula commanded the greatest philosophers of the Empire to assemble at his bedside and impart to him their most hidden and deepest wisdom; this encounter proved less successful, since Caligula was resistant to hearing banalities such as "the spirit and the body are one" being spouted, and he finally grew exasperated and ordered his bodyguards to jam white-hot pokers up the philosophers' anuses. When Caligula heard the philosophers' excruciated screams of terror and agony, he commented: "Now that is true philosophy". Then, he sent for the most sexually dexterous individuals from the remotest reaches of the Empire – members of the Quinquegentanei, Marataocupreni, Cietae, Brisei and Garamantes tribes of wild nomads, who devoted their time entirely to intensive sexual experimentation and had only ever been partially caught in the merciless grip of Rome – to teach him the legendary "seven great secrets of sexual self-annihilation".

Finally, Caligula was ready to become a god. He entered Rome without warning on 31 August AD 40 and headed straight for the

arena, where the final day of the games which celebrated his magnificent victories against the Teutonic hordes and the savage Britons was taking place. Under the rapt gaze of his adoring plebeian masses, he waded about in the glistening lake of blood which had collected from the gladiatorial killings and the wholesale slaughter of criminals and cultists, smearing it over his body and drinking it.

He then ordered his favourite gladiator, Superbus, to bugger him under the transfixed eyes of one hundred thousand delirious plebeian scum, along with a scattering of disgruntled senators and fearful merchants. A mysterious eight-foot-tall figure, masked and dressed entirely in black, held a scimitar poised over Superbus's head as he pumped away. Then, at exactly the same moment that the gasping Superbus ejaculated and the emperor convulsed in a grandiose orgasm, the black-clad figure skimmed the gladiator's head from his body with one great blow of the scimitar. A spurting torrent of arterial blood fountained up into the air from Superbus's severed neck at the same moment as his terminal semen flooded the emperor's divine rectum, the great gouts of scarlet blood falling on Caligula's head and into his mouth as he twisted around to receive them. The crowd, too, was instantly propelled into a blistering paroxysm of orgasm and elation, and in the celebratory crush, many thousands of the plebeian detritus found themselves being trampled underfoot and killed. The severed head of Superbus rolled across the dirt of the arena, a contented expression on its face from the privilege of having participated in Caligula's deification.

After the ceremony, Caligula was exhausted, and he lay weak and dispirited in his palace for almost a month. He realised that he could never recapture the intense sensory cataclysm of his deification, and that from now on, it would all be downhill for his corporeal existence. A new plan began to form in his head.

Meanwhile, great temples for the cult of the new god Caligula were being erected in every district of Rome, as well as in settlements across the entire Empire, from the smallest hamlets to the greatest cities. A magnificent temple was constructed on the Palatine hill in the centre of Rome, and Caligula appointed his corporeal self as the head priest, to revere his deified self; he remembered the loyalty of Incitatus, and made his devoted horse the deputy head priest of the temple, with a generous salary and considerable responsibilities for overseeing the rites to be celebrated there. All over the Empire, in temples dating from earlier eras, the statues of the gods which had previously been worshipped there – often for millennia – were abruptly jettisoned, so that the statue of the god Caligula could stand in their place. This desecration often led to public opposition and uprisings, especially among the religious cultists of Judea and Egypt.

In some instances, Caligula was forced to back down, since the unrest grew so virulent that it threatened to erupt into open warfare.

The wild-eyed cultists massed in the main squares of their backward towns, spitting out glossolalic exclamations interspersed with dark maledictions against Caligula's reign. The Roman legions were stretched to the limit, as they mercilessly clubbed the demonstrators and crucified the ringleaders upside-down. Caligula resented the opposition raised to his deification: he especially disliked the idea of being ranked as a secondary deity, subjugated to some bizarre, abomination-wielding god who was supposed to have created the world. In fact, the world – together with the entire cosmos – had emerged from nowhere, as a malevolent accident, and only an intensive regime of unrestrained slaughter and buggery could set that tainted world to rights. Caligula was impatient to meet the other gods and to exert his taboo-busting authority over them.

In October AD 40, Caligula faced the first and only serious opposition to his reign, in the form of an attempted coup led by four seditious senators: a father and son, both named Anicius Cerialis, together with their two co-conspirators, Betilienus Bassus and Sextus Papinus. The plot had the backing of the legions that Caligula had wanted to decimate at Boulogne, and was certain of success, until it suddenly collapsed at the last minute when the son (who would subsequently be butchered under the reign of Nero) betrayed his father and the entire conspiracy to Caligula, in a fit of sycophantic delirium. The emperor was pleased to hear the obsequious son blurt out his denunciations of his own father, and decided to pardon him. Once the son had thoroughly buggered and throttled his father into oblivion, Caligula rewarded him with the governorship of an obscure province. The other senators, together with the commanders of the mutinous legions, faced more severe penalties: some of them were tortured with fiery prongs until their entire bodies had turned black and smouldering, while others found themselves spiked from end to end, then roasted over an open fire, before being summarily beheaded. So many suspected conspirators were due to be put to death that their overworked executioners had divided them into two separate batches, to be killed on successive days. But, once the slaughter was underway, Caligula grew impatient to see everybody die all at once, and the executioners had to work at a relentlessly high speed in order to butcher all of the conspirators on the same evening. While he watched the executions, Caligula tried on a series of costumes associated with a range of gods: Mars, Hercules, Dionysus, Jupiter, Venus and Juno. He decided that he preferred the costumes of the female gods, and spent the final months of his reign wearing increasingly extravagant women's robes.

Caligula grew more arbitrary in his choice of which Romans should be executed, and took to being driven around the city in a luxurious carriage so that he could spot likely contenders for immediate evisceration. He had developed a particular repulsion for people with foppish hairstyles, and anyone caught committing such a crime against fashion (and against his own balding pate) faced the knife. He also detested having his own distinctive dress sense being encroached upon. When King Ptolemy of Mauretania, an African despot who had allied himself to Rome, unwittingly appeared in the arena wearing an attractive purple robe, Caligula had him executed on the spot, on the grounds that only he himself was allowed to wear that colour. But, even in his most heated excesses, the emperor never turned against the plebeian scum of Rome; when they saw him passing by in his carriage and shouted out affectionate insults at him – calling him an “idiot” or a “whore” – Caligula would simply smile benignly and throw them showers of golden coins, although this magnanimity invariably caused a murderous scramble which would lead to the deaths of the emperor’s insulters.

The surviving senators occasionally whispered to one another that Caligula had gone insane, but the example of what had happened to their massacred colleagues meant that they kept quiet about their misgivings in public, and in the presence of the emperor, they ostentatiously praised his costumes and his divine justice.

Caligula set up a whorehouse in an annex of the palace, using the senators’ wives as common prostitutes who could be hired by even the lowliest freaks, dwarfs and lepers; after Caligula had blissfully rolled around on the profits, they went directly into his still critically-depleted treasure hoard. The riled senators had to reconcile themselves to this outrage, and to settle in for a long haul – despite his ever more deviant and erratic behaviour, Caligula was still young and bursting with health, and clearly had many decades’ worth of escalating atrocity and sexual depravity left to undertake. Caesonia, too, knew that her husband had gone deeply berserk, but Caligula had hardly been a model of sober restraint even in the early days of his reign, and so she accepted the situation and made sure that nobody in Caligula’s vicinity ever contradicted him. On one occasion, the emperor spent several days locked in a room of his palace, and then emerged to announce that he had just copulated with the Moon. In the arena, a gladiatorial combat he attended was suddenly interrupted by a raging thunderstorm, and the drenched gladiators abandoned their fight under an ominous black sky of lightning bolts; Caligula was incensed, and ordered the god Jupiter himself to descend from the skies into the arena, so that Caligula could challenge him to a duel. When Jupiter failed to appear, the emperor claimed victory by

default. From that moment, everyone who appeared before Caligula had to prostrate themselves on the ground before him and to kiss his boots. He was waiting impatiently for the moment when his daughter Drusilla would be old enough for him to sexually institute his divine dynasty of imperial incest.

After his thwarted duel with Jupiter, Caligula began to make regular appearances in the combat zone of the arena, dressed in the costume of his favourite Thracian gladiators. His opponents, although in appearance the fiercest and most malicious of the gladiators, were always armed only with a flimsy wooden dagger, while Caligula himself brandished an enormous, razorsharp sword of glittering steel. The gladiators faced the dilemma of whether or not they should put up any resistance to the emperor's onslaughts against them: if they raised their feeble daggers against Caligula, the plebeian scum would howl with disapproval, and the imperial bodyguards were always primed to disarm and slaughter them; but, if they allowed the emperor to strike, he would unhesitatingly disembowel or decapitate them, and then revolve with his arms in the air, acknowledging the vast crowd's adulation of his hard-fought victory, his face glowing with deified exhilaration. The only solution for a gladiator intent on survival was to prostrate himself before Caligula, asking for his divine mercy; but the emperor would then allow the crowd to adjudicate on whether or not he should cut his opponent's throat, and the plebeian scum had grown increasingly capricious and blood-crazed since Caligula's return from his campaign, in a strange symbiosis which revealed the crowd's deep – and at least partially-reciprocated – attachment to their emperor. In the final months of his reign, Caligula introduced an innovation into the intricate regulations governing gladiatorial combats. From that moment, no gladiator was allowed to blink during his bout in the arena; if he did so, he faced immediate disqualification and the summary confiscation of his eyeballs. The combatants rapidly adapted themselves to the divine edict; a determined gladiator could learn to stare unblinkingly, even when his opponent's sword was descending in an unstoppable trajectory that would slice his skull cleanly in two.

In the final months of AD 40, Caligula grew so exasperated with the surly senators and the provincial opposition to his deification that he suddenly left Rome and travelled to the nearby Lake Nemi, in the Alban hills, where the engineers who had been responsible for bridging the Bay of Naples had built for him a fleet of vast and sumptuous galleys. Each vessel was decorated with a jewelled prow and elaborate mosaic floors, and had marble walls encrusted with solid gold; the galleys also possessed their own central heating system and a supply of running water which fed lavish steam baths. Some of

the vessels had been assigned to Caligula's sexual entourage, while Caesonia and Drusilla each had a galley of their own, manned by a crew of over a thousand slaves. The largest and most magnificent vessel had been reserved for Caligula's exclusive use, and at night, he would recline in the open air on a bed of swansdown, and look directly upwards at the stars, in solitude, reflecting on his future. A chorus of eunuchs sang softly to him from an adjacent vessel as he lay there, deep in thought. It was on Lake Nemi that Caligula finally decided that he was tired of the relentless sensory demands of his corporeal existence, and he abandoned his great dynastic scheme, in order to rejoin his deified sister. He regretted having to leave his adoring plebeian masses behind, but he planned to bequeath to them a regime of haywire anarchy and acute urban tumult that would be unrivalled in the history of the world. He consulted with the head of the praetorian guards, the obliging Chaerea, and also began to make plans with the commanders of his imperial bodyguard. Finally, on 10 January AD 41, he staged his ultimate spectacle of degeneracy on the lake: a massive, week-long and non-stop sexual extravaganza in which even the slaves participated, with acrobatic highlights of quadruple buggery that sent screams of ecstasy echoing around the hills. Then, abruptly infuriated with everyone and everything, Caligula ordered that all of the opulent vessels be set ablaze and sunk to the bottom of the lake, with the copulating slaves still obliviously engaged in their headlong sexual frenzy as they drowned. Along with Caesonia and the little Drusilla, Caligula returned to Rome for the last time.

In Rome, Caligula announced an exceptional spectacle of entertainment for his plebeian masses, and an amphitheatre was specially erected for the event. It was a lavish construction, composed of solid silver panels that reflected the rays of the sun in an intense blaze of light; the nails that held the amphitheatre together were made of solid gold. The hybrid building, conceived as both an arena and a theatre, was able to accommodate twenty thousand of the delirious plebeian scum, as well as the surviving senators, for whom attendance was compulsory, on pain of death. Caligula oversaw the construction, and commanded his engineers to spare no expense on a sumptuous altar of gold and precious gems, dedicated to his own deific cult, which was positioned to one side of the space. The entire construction adjoined the gates of the palace, so that Caligula could pass through one of a number of tunnels that led directly into the amphitheatre. By the time that the engineers had finished their extravagant work, only two golden coins remained from the entire imperial booty, and Caligula set those aside to be placed on his eyes at the moment when his redundant corporeal existence would come to an end.

Caligula had instructed the commander of the praetorian guard, Chaerea, to ritually butcher him during his spectacle, while Caligula's own bodyguards would massacre all of the surviving senators and then set fire to their meeting hall. With the burden of his sex-wracked body gone, Caligula would then be entirely transformed into an immortal god, and, together with Drusilla, he would continue to rule over the Empire, under the banner of divine buggery, exacting ever-greater sensory infernos of torture, slaughter and incestuous copulation upon the peoples of the known world. Caligula knew that the only surviving candidate for the position of emperor was his cretinous and incapable uncle, Claudius. With the Senate out of the way, total uproar would govern the Empire, and the plebeian scum would run wild in ferocious waves of mass obliteration, careering purposelessly from one end of the imperial domain to the other, in gangs of millions of roaring human figures, leaving scorched and blackened earth wherever they went. With his brilliant plan for the future fully formulated, Caligula then spent several days resting in his palace, in anticipation of the upheavals to come.

On the morning of Caligula's final spectacle, 24 January AD 41, the plebeian masses seethed around the amphitheatre, impatient to be admitted. It was now traditional for them to storm the entrance gates to the Roman amphitheatres in a mad crush as soon as they were opened, leaving many thousands of people dead; the death toll was exacerbated on this occasion by the limited number of overeager scum who could be allowed inside the amphitheatre, which was much smaller than Caligula's grand gladiatorial arena. The crowd settled on the high tiers and waited for the spectacle to begin. Below them, the scattering of surviving senators sat lugubriously. Many of the city's wealthy merchants had by this time been assigned for summary execution (along with their entire families), in order that Caligula could seize their assets, but those who had not yet been earmarked for murder sat in wary silence between the senators and the plebeian scum. Caligula's incontinent moron of an uncle, the drooling Claudius, also joined the crowd. At ground level, the altar of gold and gems glittered in the sunlight, and a performance stage, covered in pristine white cloth, had been set up in the centre of the space. Then, through one of the tunnels that led from the palace, Caligula appeared in a robe of scarlet, flanked on either side by Caesonia and the little Drusilla. He took his place on a diamond-encrusted throne, appearing subdued and preoccupied, and the spectacle began. At a signal from Chaerea, the emperor's glowering bodyguards surrounded the senators, to ensure that not one of them could escape. Caligula's final night on earth had been a troubled one: as usual, he had been tormented by insomnia, and had screamed at

the sky, ordering the dawn to arrive. When he did finally fall asleep, he dreamed that he had arrived in the celestial domain of the gods, but Jupiter abruptly kicked him out again, so that he fell back to earth.

To start off the day's entertainment, Caligula came forward with an emerald-studded dagger and slaughtered a flamingo; the blood of the writhing bird spurted in all directions, onto Caligula and the senators in the front tiers of the amphitheatre. Since Caligula was wearing a scarlet robe, the thick blood coating him remained invisible. It was the first time that a flamingo had ever been seen in Rome, and Caligula had wanted to provide astounding innovations to the engrossed crowd right up to the last moment. But the main attraction of the spectacle was to be a dance performance designed by Caligula himself, *Cinyras*, about the epic acts of a heroic figure, consumed with obsessions of incest, who is finally betrayed and brutally murdered, along with his daughter, in a tidal wave of blood.

The young Asian dancers who appeared in the performance had travelled specially from the eastern frontier of the Empire. Although the plebeian scum appreciated the denouement of the performance, they found much of it tiresome, and whistled and snorted impatiently, much to Caligula's exasperation. He began to wonder if the plebeian scum deserved what he had in store for them, after all.

The second part of the entertainment consisted of another dance performance, *Laureolus*, which again terminated in violence, with the contorted dancers vomiting blood all over the stage, so that by the end of the two performances, the white cloth that covered the stage had been entirely saturated in floods and clots of gore. Most of the dancers had lost their lives during the spectacle, although the three who had performed the roles of the slaughterers had survived, and stood with bowed heads among the heaped-up carcasses of their fellow performers. The crowd initially voiced their approval of the spectacle languidly, but once they spotted Caligula himself vigorously applauding, the acclaim for the entertainment built to a shattering cacophony that lacerated the very air, and the emperor was satisfied with their response. While a group of assistants carried the moribund and blood-sodden performers off the stage by their arms and legs, the surviving performers made their exit via one of the tunnels that led out of the amphitheatre at ground level. Caligula followed the dancers into the tunnel to congratulate them on their performance, and took the opportunity to commit his ultimate act of buggery, servicing the two male and one female dancers in rapid succession. Just before he ejaculated for the last time, he pulled his pulsing imperial pole out of the performer's anus and stepped back into the amphitheatre, under the gaze of the avid plebeian masses, spouting great gouts of divine

semen up into the air in elegant arcs, before they fell to the ground and seeped into the dirt. For the first time that day, the crowd now grew acutely excited, sensing that the emperor had prepared an astonishing spectacle for them that would excoriate their transfixed retinas. Caligula made an obscene gesture to Chaerea, and spoke his final word: "Testicles!" The signal for the last act of Caligula's reign had been given.

Chaerea, backed by a brutish squad of ten guards, advanced on the emperor, who was looking blissfully upwards, anticipating his reunion with his deified sister. The crowd expelled a gaping exhalation of horror as their ecstasy instantly turned to sensory acid.

The first blow of Chaerea's massive sword came down between Caligula's neck and left shoulder, carving a seven-inch chasm into his entire upper body. The assassin then gratingly extracted his sword in order to strike again, and a cascade of arterial blood shot ten feet into the air. Caligula staggered in agony, but remained on his feet, looking around at the endless tiers of openmouthed, stunned spectators as his vision began to cloud. The grunting Chaerea, who was enjoying his good day's work of deicide, now drove the sword into Caligula's stomach, twisting the blade as it impaled the emperor's intestines and pushed its way through, the tip appearing from his back with a liquid hiss. Once again, Chaerea pulled the sword back out again in a twisting motion, and as it emerged from the gaping hole in the emperor's navel, a large percentage of his intestines exited with it. They fell to the ground in a reeking, slippery heap, still attached to the organs that remained in Caligula's body.

Chaerea looked momentarily at Caligula to check whether he wanted the final blow to be struck, and from deep inside the black pall of agony that was falling over his short-circuiting neuro-cerebral system, the emperor's eyes flickered affirmatively at his assassin.

Chaerea rapidly took a step backwards and swung his sword around his head, then lopped off Caligula's head with one precision-aimed blow. The crowd watched in utter dismay as Caligula's head sailed through the air and landed directly on the altar that had been raised to his deification. The lips still moved convulsively, mouthing obscenities, for the fifteen seconds that it took for the blood flow to the brain to gradually extinguish itself. His glaring eyes scanned the awestruck plebeian masses, then a screen of oblivion crossed over them, and, still open, they suddenly dulled. Meanwhile, the rest of Caligula's demolished body began to crumble, and the spindly legs of the imperial carcass clumsily buckled: ferocious scarlet jets began spouting into the air, drenching the spectators in the lower tiers of the amphitheatre, as the wildly spasming heart desperately tried to pump blood towards the now-detached brain. Abruptly, it gave up the futile

effort, shutting down the emperor's vastly over-abused sensory network after one final cardiac paroxysm. In a messy tangle of arms and legs, Caligula's body slumped to the ground with a muffled crash, and lay still, on its back. Each of the ten guards who had advanced on the emperor with Chaerea now stepped forward, and simultaneously plunged their swords through the body, pinioning it to the ground. One of the blows sliced through Caligula's well-worn sexual organs, pulping them instantaneously. The reign of the third Julio-Claudian emperor was over.

For a minute, everyone in the amphitheatre looked on in silent stupefaction, at the decapitated and steaming body of the former emperor sprawled alongside the performance stage, and his severed head resting upright in a spreading pool of blood on the altar.

The Roman Empire now appeared poised on the precipice of many millennia of uncontrollable uproar and anarchy that would engulf the entire known world. Only Chaerea appeared nonchalant, his task for the day accomplished; using Caligula's perforated robes, he wiped away the blood from his sword and put it back into its sheath. Then, as the imperial bodyguards began to murderously close in on the terrified senators, an authoritarian voice commanded them to stop: Caligula's drooling cretin of an uncle, Claudius, had emerged from the crowd and was standing before the altar. To the amazement of everyone, Claudius barked out a string of orders, bringing all of the guards rigidly to attention. Slowly, it dawned on the crowd that Claudius was no moron after all; he pulled out a sachet of artificial drool from his mouth, and flung it to the ground. The plebeian scum, cowed, filed silently out of the amphitheatre; the relieved senators congratulated one another on their narrow escape from annihilation, and started rushing towards Claudius to pledge their undying allegiance to him.

For Claudius – the sole adult male survivor of the decimated Julio-Claudian family – there had been only one way to survive the murderous onslaughts of Tiberius and then Caligula: by appearing to be an inoffensive, zero-witted fool that nobody could ever be bothered to devote a few moments to slaughtering. His strategy had succeeded. Now, as he soon made clear, he controlled the entire Empire.

Claudius's seizure of imperial power had been completed by the evening. He quickly won over the potentially-mutinous legions by distributing his entire personal fortune among them, and by promising them that he would immediately start planning the glorious invasion of Britain – and this time, the legions would actually cross the Channel, and eventually subdue the boorish British hordes. The remaining members of the Senate had their full powers and privileges restored to them, and responded with obsequious loyalty. The

nonplussed Chaerea was instantly taken away and executed for the imperial assassination, and all of the guards who had known of Caligula's grand scheme found themselves being slowly garrotted in the palace's dungeons. Caesonia was tracked down in the palace and mercilessly eliminated; the little Drusilla was swung around by her ankles in the air, until her skull hit the palace wall and her brains spilled out in an elongated exclamation mark of blood and mashed cerebral tissue. Claudius arranged for the body of his predecessor to be partially cremated under cover of darkness, and the ashes buried in a remote location; after Caligula's sisters had been allowed to return from exile, they dug up the decayed scraps of flesh and charred bones, urinated on them, and then fed them to dogs. The pompous senators publicly condemned Caligula's acts of atrocity, and consigned him to perpetual damnation; the temples and statues devoted to his deification were all destroyed, and a profound oblivion fell on his reign (although the memory of it would burst vividly into life again within a few years).

Claudius then faced his hardest challenge: that of winning over the plebeian scum. Once the imperial coffers had been replenished by legitimate means, he ordered lavish games to be arranged. Then, in the most brutal games ever to cast their shadow of infamy upon the Roman Empire, Claudius astounded the crowd by brazenly eating his dinner just as the most blood-sodden killing was taking place; he loudly smacked his lips and beamed at the crowd as he pushed slabs of meat into his gluttonous maw. Throughout the entire games, he never once gave a thumbs-up signal to the defeated gladiators who looked to him for mercy, and he ordered that, at the moment of their deaths, all of the gladiators had to remove their helmets, so that the crowd could watch death at work. Great illuminated screens were erected around the top tiers of the arena, extolling Claudius's magnanimity and detailing the amount of low-value coins which each member of the audience would receive if they co-operated with the new regime. By the end of the games, the plebeian scum were roaring Claudius's revered name. The momentarily divine Caligula had vanished into the endlessly blowing winds that crossed the vast domain of the Roman Empire.

2. GLADIATOR : BLOOD, SEMEN, ECSTASY

The gladiatorial arena was a site both of momentary, intensive freedom and of always-imminent atrocity. Life for its battling participants and entranced spectators began and ended there. The origins of gladiatorial combat had emerged in ritualistic ceremonies designed to placate monstrous deities which were believed to inhabit the borders of the Mediterranean ocean, occasionally insurging into the cities, driven to ferocity by the lack of human sacrifices made to them, in order to wreak turmoil and to swallow entire populations alive. Countless human sacrifices, especially of virgins, infants and pregnant women, were devoted to appeasing those maleficent deities; but the monsters demanded an ever greater deluge of blood.

The gladiatorial battles were conceived as a means of avoiding mass human sacrifices, by giving a small group of fearless men the mission of courageously fighting to the death on sacred sites where the monstrous gods would be watching. The intention was that those threatening deities would be awed into a pacified state by the intensive butchery exacted on one another by the extra-ordinary band of combatants. The gladiatorial fights thus began as a means both to challenge and to give a spectacular performance for the gods, whose great malediction against human life coincided with the very origins of Roman civilization, and would ultimately decimate it.

But by the era of Caligula, those origins had become perverted to a maximal degree. The gladiatorial combats retained their aura of being majestic feats, performed within a hanging pall of blood for the edification of feverishly watching eyes, but their audience was now composed of a hundred thousand human beings, ranging from the most destitute and depraved scum of Roman society to the emperor himself. Necessarily, that emperor took the place of the original deities. Those gruesome, intangible presences crystallized into the unique physical form of the divine emperor himself, who watched the games with a permanent erection, deciding on the life or death of the combatants with a capricious twist of the thumb.

The status of the gladiators had transformed over centuries from that of heroic saviours to that of the most undignified, reviled detritus of the Empire. Whether they were free men or slaves, the gladiators comprised the most disinherited layer of Roman society.

Only those few gladiators who became the subject of the crowd's adulation achieved a soaring ascent of their social status, and that lasted only for as long as they were held within the crowd's fickle

esteem. In Rome, the gladiators were housed in austere barracks, invariably run by a brutish, aged taskmaster who had himself been a mediocre gladiator (the most eminent gladiators always fought bout after bout until they were themselves slaughtered) who harangued them with nostalgic accounts of how his own era had been better than theirs. Some of the gladiators belonged to the emperor as his personal property, and were trained in schools funded by one of his wealthy acolytes. The gladiators slept on wooden benches in the unheated barracks, and were awakened at four o'clock each morning by having buckets of icy water thrown over them. Since most gladiators only fought two or three brief bouts each year (so that their appearances could be eagerly anticipated for months beforehand by the crowd), they had considerable time on their hands. Once the basic strategies of combat had been learned, over a gruelling induction period of a year to eighteen months, the gladiators were left to their own devices for most of each day, apart from the practice sessions which took place at dawn.

The gladiators were hard men of destitute origin, whose days revolved around an endless struggle against fear. But noble buggery was the order of the night, and if two combatants from the same school were due to face one another in the arena on the following day, they would invariably spend the preceding night in grunting tussles, to discover who could take the upper hand sexually. As potent symbols of virility – whose sweat was collected and sold as an aphrodisiac – the gladiators were also surrounded by an entourage of female prostitutes and fans, the so-called “screaming whores”, who hung around the entrance to the barracks until one or two of them at a time were allowed inside for sessions of multiple penetration. The gladiators evolved a language all of their own, comprising only forty to fifty one-syllable words, accentuated by a system of dismissive grunts and obscene gestures. As a result, on the rare occasions when the gladiators emerged from their barracks, they would find themselves unable to make themselves understood in the streets by the populace, who assumed (often correctly) that they were being propositioned to take part in bizarre sex acts. The gladiators' regime was akin to that of sumo wrestlers in contemporary Japan, themselves similarly sexually idolized and subject to sudden falls from grace; the key difference was that the sumo wrestler's most undignified fate was to be abruptly upended by his opponent into the crowd, whereas the gladiator could very well find himself in the process of being eviscerated alive under the gloating eyes of one hundred thousand dementedly roaring spectators.

The immense amphitheatre which formed the arena for gladiatorial combats during the era of Caligula had been constructed

by a wealthy enthusiast, Statilius Taurus, and had already been in use for around thirty years. It would later be destroyed during the reign of Nero, and the Colosseum constructed by Jewish prisoners near its ruins. And Caligula's arena had itself been preceded by innumerable others, accumulating in size and majesty over centuries, each successively replaced when the braying crowd overspilled its limits, or else simply tore it apart in the insane frenzies of bloodlust and aberrance with which the population of Rome was intermittently infected. The arena was built for the mass hordes, and for no-one else. All behaviour was permitted on its upper tiers, where the plebeian scum amassed, crammed together in their thousands. On the lower seating tiers, senators, merchants and wealthy visitors to Rome sprawled on more spacious seating, their attention often diverted to vitriolic in-fighting and score-settling among themselves. In between the rich and the scum, a scattered array of philosophers, magicians and dissidents sat under the close gaze of the imperial bodyguards, since they could be a source of potential trouble. The philosophers often dissimulated their excitement at witnessing the combats by affecting an air of disdain, discussing the futility of life with their companions, while the magicians spent their time prophesying the utter annihilation which would be Rome's due fate.

Poised above the infinitely extending mass of screaming, hooting and overheated bodies, in an enclosed and luxuriant area which gave him the best view of the massacres, the emperor himself could be seen watching the games. It was the emperor alone who had the authority to decide the dates and programmes for the games; an emperor such as Caligula who could be observed relishing every moment – entranced by each beheading, mauling and disembowelment – won the immediate adulation of the crowd. All emperors knew that the most effective pacification of the otherwise rebellious and unruly plebeian scum could be achieved via the most visually spectacular and technologically sophisticated games, with the maximum number of blood-drenched fatalities. The arena became stage to a form of primaeval snuff theatre, a controlled catharsis of unalloyed carnage where the shrieks of the butchered were countered by antistrophes of sexual ecstasy from the onlookers.

The importance of ensuring that the games were staged lavishly and regularly was paramount; games could be scheduled to coincide with particular festivals or to mark the anniversary of great events and military victories in the history of the Empire, but could equally well be concocted whenever the plebeian mob showed signs of unrest, or simply when the emperor's deviant whim dictated that they should be held.

The arena was the one place where the lowliest human detritus of

Rome could make their voice heard by the emperor. And, if his favourite gladiators were winning and if he was feeling sexually satiated, the emperor could indulge even the most obtuse demands or comments. Short intervals in the combats were assigned for these public interviews between the emperor and his subjects.

One by one, a few of the spectators would cautiously get to their feet and yell their contribution out over the echoing arena towards the recumbent emperor. Many emperors liked nothing better than to exchange inane quips with the most mentally damaged of their subjects, in order to show themselves off in the most favourable light. And every emperor – except Tiberius – welcomed ribald repartee of any kind: the more obscene, the better. Mild insults about their inbred physical peculiarities could be levelled at the emperors by the assembled scum (themselves habitually deformed, mentally abnormal and freakish) at such moments, and taken in good heart by even the most murderous tyrants. However, all emperors without exception were notably unreceptive to appeals for particular monetary levies to be lifted, especially if the income from such financial burdens on their subjects could be channelled directly into the capacious imperial coffers. Both Caligula and Nero would unhesitatingly order the slaughter of the hapless person making such an outrageous request, together with the several hundred people sitting around him, who had been contaminated by association. The order would be carried out instantly by the sword-wielding imperial bodyguards, and a mass stampede towards the arena's labyrinthine exits would invariably entail the further deaths of several thousand crushed individuals.

The dates of major gladiatorial combats, each usually lasting for one to two weeks, were announced by erecting notices on tombstones in all of the cities, towns and villages of the Empire.

Although most provincial places had their own minor arena and games, the spectacular events staged in Rome itself, under the divine gaze of the emperor, possessed an irresistible attraction. From all over the Empire – from Gortyn in the south to Vetera in the north – the peasants would abandon their animals and crops, the merchants would neglect their business affairs, and the prostitutes would discard their clients in mid-fellatio, and set out in a mass convergence upon the capital. Gangs of brigands would often waylay the would-be spectators as they passed through wild areas, leaving them messily garrotted and hanging from trees, their purses emptied.

When the surviving travellers finally approached Rome, often after a journey of many months, the massively over-populated city threw out towards them a sensory tidal wave of raw exhilaration mixed with human and bestial stench. The wastelands around the arena became saturated with improvised tents, although many spectators simply

slept exposed in the open air. The native inhabitants of Rome fleeced and robbed the great influx of visitors, and the intricate tariffs of prostitution (a triple penetration topped the list) soared.

Since the entrance to the games was always by free admission, the moment when the arena's gates were opened at dawn proved acutely dangerous, since a swarm of seventy to one hundred thousand crushed-together bodies would try to enter all at once; this was another source of mass fatalities through suffocation. Although a separation between the male and female spectators on the upper tiers of the arena was ostensibly prescribed, it was never enforced. Once the audience was seated, the games would begin immediately – with some summary executions of criminals, purely to whet the crowd's appetite for the far more entrenched combats to come – and would continue, with short breaks every few hours, until the fall of darkness.

No spectator ever left the place they had seized on the tiers: if they needed to urinate or defecate, they would do it on the spot.

The human bodies were packed together so closely (often seated on rough wooden benches, although in provincial arenas it was customary to sit directly on the stone tiers) that, as the day went on, huge clouds of steam would rise up from that corporeal overload, and the arena would appear as a heated human cauldron. The vocal noise was unbearably loud, sustained even during the intervals when no conflict or killing was taking place, since the crowd would utilize those moments for acrimonious disputes about the ranking of particular gladiators: such disputes were often resolved only by knife-thrusts discreetly exchanged between the quarrelling factions.

At the fall of dark, when the emperor departed and the games concluded for the day, the crowd would reluctantly file out of the arena. Nothing held any importance for them except the next day's continuation of the spectacle, and so they would usually throw themselves to the ground, as close to the arena's entrance as possible, and try to sleep for a few hours, their ears still ringing with a ferocious noise of screams and taunts, mixed with the echoing cries of the maimed combatants.

In the arena, the intricate regime of atrocity at ground level was mirrored by the differing layers of sexual activity underway among the spectators, as the tiers of seating ascended upwards, from the elite of Roman society to its ultimate dross. The preferred sexual act among the aristocracy was invariably fellatio, and the young male and female companions of the elderly senators and merchants were selected for their expertise and subtlety: those sex acts took place almost invisibly, with hands and mouths working in stealthy gestures, all the more sophisticated for their covert nature. But up on the highest tiers of the arena, such delicacy was unnecessary, and the crowds emanated a

relentless cacophony of sexual exclamations and neural furore. In the domain of heterosexual acts, the preferred position was with the young woman crouched over the sitting man, both of them facing out towards the struggles in the arena as the woman moved on the man's penis in a rhythm designed to exactly match the rhythms of the combat below – slow and wary at first, and then increasingly frenzied. Often, when a revered gladiator executed a particularly expert sword-thrust, the woman would open her robe as a mark of adulation, revealing the hard-nippled expanse of her breasts and the penis moving in and out of her vagina. The man would be gasping over the back of her shoulder, trying to maintain a clear view on the action below as the woman's spasmodic movements became ever more erratic. But buggery too was a preferred medium of sexual exchange on those high tiers of the arena, both for homosexual and heterosexual participants, and also for those to whom the division between the two sexes evanesced in a miasma of lust and momentary freedom. The same, crouched posture was often adopted; but an equally attractive alternative would be for one participant to kneel on the benches, with a perfect view on the carnage far below, while the other participant stood behind, his penis incessantly grating its way into his lover's rectum.

Obviously, this variant would often cause friction within the saturated ranks of the other spectators, since it would block the view of those seated in the rows behind the copulating pairs. The best solution was for those who preferred that sexual position to monopolize the benches at the very top of the arena; as a result, the highest summit of the amphitheatre was crowned with a circle of wild sodomites, whose screams of ecstasy or torn anal muscles gave an urgent texture to the more generalized sound of vaginal penetration and its resulting cries. But many of those cries were, in any event, drowned out in the thunderous bloodlust commotion of the rampant crowd.

The expert capacity of the sexual participants to regulate their acts in intimate tandem with the gladiatorial combats in the arena below was a matter of considerable pride, both for the wealthy denizens of the lower tiers and the plebeian scum of the upper tiers.

The crucial factor in that proximity of bloodshed and ejaculation was engrained training and practice – all of the participants demanded a finesse of timing in their couplings. Such expertise sometimes brought great wealth to skilled participants, such as those youthful prostitutes servicing the rich merchants who were able to make their client's semen shoot in a great rush into the air (or into their mouths, depending on the employer's preference) at the exact moment that the struggle below also achieved its resolution. The young girls and boys,

able to modulate their buccal pressure with the maximum proficiency, had been intensively schooled, under the tuition of retired prostitutes known as “fuck-masters”; exceptionally well-endowed slaves were strapped down and compelled to undergo bouts of fellatio often extending over twelve to fourteen hours, until their members were so chafed and sore that they would plead to be re-assigned to latrine-cleaning duties. On the upper tiers, such sexual erudition was absent, but a high degree of co-ordination was still achieved, between the moment of orgasm and the moment when the gladiatorial combat ended in the extinguishment or capitulation of one or other of the parties. The eyes of the spectators shifted incessantly between the combat below and the facial contractions and exhaling mouths of their lovers. All sex acts were strictly suspended for the periods when the crowd awaited the raised or lowered thumb of the emperor, even when ejaculation or orgasm were imminent. Then, amid the roaring celebration or dissent which accompanied the emperor’s caprice, a flood of multiple ejaculations would immediately convulse the crowd.

The pre-eminent aberrations of the crowd would sometimes result in such a rigorous doubling of carnage and orgasm proving impractical. Carried away by the elation of the arena’s atmosphere or by the victory of a favoured gladiator, great chains of copulating figures would amass on the highest tiers. Although three, four or even five spectators could, with much practice, seat themselves on each another’s laps, gripping one another by the shoulders and anchoring themselves via their sexual organs, that precarious, tower-like configuration presented the danger of the figures suddenly toppling over at the moment of orgasm; the sheer slopes of the arena meant that a fatal fall could result from such an over-balancing. The more usual arrangement would be to cordon off a rear bench and allocate it exclusively to multiple sexual constellations. A special problem would arise if a spectator had brought a dog or other large animal along to the games (after all, everyone and everything was entitled to free admission), since sexual combinations of human and bestial figures proved to be volatile arrangements: a dog with a penis lodged in its anus and its own penis moving at speed in a vagina would not necessarily be sufficiently attentive to the nuances of the gladiatorial conflict below, and would fire off its semen at inopportune moments. But, on the whole, the sexual regime of the arena’s tiers took its cues from those of the combat below, and the endless waves of acclamation which accompanied the slicing of a defeated gladiator’s throat were always mixed with the guttural and ecstatic cries springing from the accomplishment of innumerable sex acts.

The spouting trajectories of blood which punctuated and concluded the gladiatorial combats also had their close counterparts

within the crowd. Strategies of power and revenge were at work here. Even the most senior senator would sometimes find his dignity had been ruffled by the spattering impact of a rain of semen onto his bald pate, launched from somewhere further back in the near-perpendicular seating tiers. The crowd watched both for the moment when a stream of rich arterial blood would issue from a wound pierced in a gladiator's flesh, and also for the simultaneous gush of sperm from those in their more immediate proximity. A skilled prostitute, highly trained in the art of fellatio, could direct the geyser of an ejaculating penis towards the head of one of his or her employer's enemies; a direct hit would always be rewarded with a generous payment. Nothing pleased a senator or merchant more than to see his rival or enemy turn towards him, his concentration on the games broken, and glare upwards as the trails of semen dripped down from his apoplectic forehead, trying to search out its source.

But for the purists, such as the dour philosophers, such worldly or score-settling uses of ejaculation were perceived as deeply undignified, and they would simply shoot their semen as far into the air as possible, as a gesture encapsulating the futility of all earthly ambitions. Sadly, the high barriers which surrounded the ground level of the arena – ostensibly erected to prevent the wild animals used in bestial combats from leaping among the spectators – prevented the crowd from ever covering the gladiators themselves (either in derision or in adulation) with the tribute of their semen.

One particular sexual spectacle of the arena was reserved only for exceptional occasions. This coincided with those extravagant events designed by the more exorbitant emperors, Caligula among them, which involved flooding the ground level of the arena through a network of water channels, in order to stage simulations of great naval battles. Immense ships would enter the arena and lock together in conflict; the participants often drowned in the seething water or were obliterated by broadside attacks.

Invariably, the engulfing of the arena in water comprised only a small segment of the day's entertainment; the rapid system of drainage enabled the ground to be once again dry and pristine for the next feature of the programme. Such floods naturally required an appropriate reaction from the arena's spectators, and co-ordinated ejaculations were the order of the day. At the climax of the sea-battles – when one faction had bloodily triumphed, and the simulacrum of the ocean had served its purpose and was about to be drained – a collective gush of semen would signal the crowd's appreciation of the emperor's spectacular benevolence. Even those in the crowd without the luxury of a facilitating prostitute or sexual partner were expected to include themselves in that fluidic outburst.

They would unleash fountains of urine at that moment of mass ejaculation, so that a gathering wall of semen and urine would descend, in monsoon-like showers, from the top to the bottom of the arena's levels.

At the end of each day's games, it would fall to the slaves assigned to the cleaning of the arena to mop up the accumulated semen and urine from the seating tiers. Just as the gladiators left a morass of blood and rawly severed body parts at ground level, the spectators too had their own duty to imprint the stone of the arena with their corporeal deposits. It was a difficult and dangerous job to prepare the seating for the next day's crowd, and the cleaners would often slip on the treacherous surface and plummet to oblivion from the highest tiers of the arena, where the residue of semen was at its most dense. The cleaners would discover the left-behind corpses of open-eyed spectators, especially those elderly figures whose orgasmic tumult – often undergone beneath a relentlessly burning sky, shaded only by an overhead canopy which was shifted by sailors during the course of the day and offered the dross of the crowd little protection – had led to cardiac arrest and a swift death. The last echoes of the crowd's screams still hung in the darkening evening air, as the hundreds of slaves worked to channel the sperm and other debris out through stone channels, allowing it to course through a complex of specially-designed chutes, until it was finally ejected from the arena and landed in the dust of the wastelands that surrounded the magnificent amphitheatre, often drenching the people who had camped there.

Every emperor knew that he must himself be seen masturbating during the games, or being assiduously serviced by the Empire's most skilled prostitutes, in order to win the maximum acclaim from the crowd. Caligula, who was renowned for the size of his organ, was always ready to unveil it before the crowd, which responded with gasps of incredulity and adoration. It proved to be a key factor in Caligula's great popularity with the plebeian population of Rome, from the most abject scum upwards. Everyone remembered that Julius Caesar had refused to unsheathe his penis before the crowd, preferring to affect disdain for the sexual spectacle of the arena by reading dull administrative documents during the games. And the emperor Tiberius had been of such a terminally dour disposition that he had refused to even attend the games at all. Those figures were remembered with little affection, as having created nothing of the essential civilization of Rome and as having provided little entertainment for the edification of its voraciously demanding citizens. Caligula, of all the Roman emperors, best understood the fragility of the membrane that separated death and sex, just as he also perceived the ephemerality of the division between anal and vaginal sexual muscles. The arena

exacted great sacrifices from everyone who entered it, and most of all from the emperor himself. To wholly fulfil the vital art of sex and death, the corporeally living god Caligula was finally ready to die in order to accommodate the ultimate desire of his expectant subjects, and did so, provoking a sensory seism which came to mark the supreme moment of Rome's perverse history and aberrant civilization.

The entrance of the gladiators provoked the greatest neurally-detonating rush of noise and sexual energy. Below the surface level of the arena, the gladiators began to make their way through the labyrinthine tunnels which criss-crossed its subterranean vaults. Along the way, they passed by the cages of the wild beasts that would appear later on in the day's entertainment. The lions and panthers roared and lashed out with their razored paws at the gladiators' legs. The floors of their cages were equipped with pulley devices to ensure that they could be suddenly levitated into the arena and catapulted into the open air without any bystanders suffering injury. The very foundations of the arena shook in great spasms as the crowd stamped its two hundred thousand sandaled or bare feet in unison, impatient to see the first gladiator appear for the day's combat. Next, the gladiators passed by the cages assigned for the detrital human elements who would be massacred during that day's games: a miserable collection of sobbing or cursing figures jammed the cages. The most fierce of them were the heavily bearded, sneering prisoners who had been captured during the perpetual battles waged by the Roman legions against the Teutonic hordes along the banks of the river Rhine. Still wearing their woolly costumes, their grim faces scarred by decades of brutish fighting, the unsubduable Teutonic prisoners spat and hurled invective at the passing gladiators as they awaited their own bloody demise. Finally, the gladiators passed the cages which held the condemned members of the many religious cults which proliferated in the Empire, especially in the region of Judea. The naked and dung-smeared acolytes of magicians and dubious prophets lacked the ferocity of the Teutonic captives, and many of them simply huddled together and whimpered in terror at their imminent evisceration; others, still imbued with psychotic fervour, screamed abuse at the gladiators and warned them that their participation in the ungodly regime of Rome would exclude them from one eden or another.

But the gladiators proved oblivious to every taunt, and as they strode towards the arena's entrance, their minds were locked into concentration on the combat to come; they attempted to uproot any treacherous trace of panic from their faces or bodies, since a gladiator who showed the least sign of dread or nervous hesitation would be cut down instantly by his opponent. Then, the underground cacophony of screams, bestial roars, whining sobs and maledictions abruptly fell

silent as the gladiators emerged from the tunnels and entered the arena. The subterranean stench of terror fell away and the pristine early-morning air struck the gladiators' faces. After the dank darkness of the underground passages, the sudden daylight blinded them, and for a moment, there was no sound to be heard, either in the arena or in the vast expanse of Rome itself. Every eye in the crowd was fixed upon the gladiators, from the gaze of the basest scum to that of the emperor himself. Then, massive sonic shock-waves resonated in spirals around the arena, pulsing outwards and threatening to send that building, and the entire city around it, crashing to the ground. The gladiators heard the crowd's great chant:

“Gladiator! Gladiator! Now kill! Now kill! Rome demands it!” The ultimate paradox of the gladiator's life lay in the contrast between that momentary acclamation and the lower-than-zero status which he habitually held in Roman society. As each gladiator made his ritual greeting to the emperor – “Those about to die salute you!” – he possessed an exceptional nobility and purpose which still echoed with the original role of the gladiator as the liberator of the Mediterranean world from its malicious deities. But as soon as he stepped outside the arena, the gladiator was back in his usual sphere of unrelenting tedium, scorn and buggery. Innumerable mosaics and carvings were created, throughout the Empire, depicting gladiators in the heated combat which was their authentic element, with one elated gladiator about to plunge his sword or trident into the exposed throat of his exhausted opponent: such images served as exciting sex aids for their wealthy owners. But the everyday life of the gladiator generated no compulsive engagement for anybody, apart from the sexual hangers-on who dreamed of having their vaginas and anuses full of the fresh semen of the same gladiator that they were now seeing in the process of being cut into bloody pieces of slaughtered meat in the arena. Some gladiators had futile ambitions to finally leave their profession and become farmers or slave-drivers, but only the most unexceptional among them actually received the wooden sword of cowardice from the emperor which showed that they had been allowed to cast off their gladiatorial status. Few actually made anything of their subsequent lives, and it was a familiar sight in the most backward parts of the Empire to encounter a wandering ex-gladiator, destitute and starving, who was ready to commit any act of murderous or carnal depravity in exchange for a dry hunk of spelt-flour bread. Like *ronin*, the masterless-samurai class of seventeenth-century Japan, the former gladiators led broken lives of nostalgia and bitter regret, belatedly wishing that they could have died in the arena while hearing the rabid roar of the crowd as their ultimate sensory input. The best of the gladiators would never leave their profession,

tenaciously fighting until the end, and finally exiting the cursed world in a blaze of glory.

The number of gladiators whose lives were expended in the most profligate of Caligula's spectacles could be enormous, extending into thousands of pairs of fighters. His miserly predecessor, Tiberius, had kept the crowd rationed to under a hundred gladiatorial pairings for each games, and prior to that, the first of the Julio-Claudian emperors, Augustus, had only managed a maximum of six hundred pairs. As in all domains, atrocity soared under Caligula's control of the gladiatorial combats. The main provider of the finances for each games, known as the "editor", was invariably a fabulously wealthy individual who wanted to ingratiate himself with the emperor by providing an event whose sheer excess, in terms of both violent deaths and luxurious attention to spectacular detail, would make even the most extravagant of previous games appear parsimonious by contrast. The emperor would lavishly reward any outstanding "editor" who managed to provide him with a new dimension of sensory overkill, often by simply re-assigning entire tracts of the Empire to be the lucrative fiefdom of that ambitious aristocrat or corrupt senator. The current ruler of the territory would usually find himself being inexplicably crucified or roasted alive, in order to ensure that he would neglect to dispute the new arrangement. Although the "editor" was nominally in charge of arranging the contents of the games, it was the emperor himself who had the final say; some emperors even took on the role of "editor" themselves if they wanted to stage a particularly spectacular carnage.

The technical details of the spectacles were left to the most ingenious of the owners of gladiatorial schools to devise, and tens of thousands of engineers and designers from throughout the Empire were entrusted with making sure that the staging of the gladiators' entrances and exits – and their confrontations with suddenly-appearing wild beasts such as ravening lions and cougars – were synchronised in such a way as to drive the crowd into the most berserk frenzy imaginable. Innovations such as multiple-bladed decapitating machines, designed to harvest the heads of victims planted in the sand to neck level, were a further provocation to orgiastic abandon.

Once each of the combatants had approached and saluted the emperor – entrusting his life to the most arbitrary, divine caprice – and had received a lascivious wink or languid gesture in return, depending upon whether the muscled physique and easily-discernible penis of the gladiator appealed to the imperial eye, all of the gladiators then gathered together and began to form a procession which circuted the borders of the arena's combat zone. The gladiators were grouped into distinct factions, each armed with a different array

of weapons; the combats almost always matched a gladiator with one set of weapons against another with a dissimilar set. One faction had their bodies covered almost entirely in protective leather and metal costumes, and carried small, circular shields, along with sabres and daggers; another faction appeared almost naked, with only miniscule loincloths pulled tightly over their sexual organs, and carried long, oblong shields and hefty swords.

The gladiators removed their heavy helmets for a moment, allowing the straining crowd to pick out their favourites, as they screamed in wild adulation. Because each gladiator only appeared in the arena at intervals of every four to six months, the crowd eagerly convulsed with the fulfilment of lengthy anticipation whenever it recognized the face and body of an exceptional or preferred combatant. And the gladiators themselves were invariably eager to start fighting, after their long months of forced seclusion and mind-numbing monotony in the sex-reeking barracks. Although they often formed brusque, monosyllabic friendships with their fellow gladiators in those confined quarters, the raw elation of the arena instantly shattered any such bonds, and the eyes of the gladiators scanned their adversaries with excoriating menace.

Although the combat pairings of gladiators were ostensibly determined at the last minute, and left to chance, with a drawing of lots, this was entirely a bogus facade. The combats had actually been decided weeks beforehand, painstakingly arranged in order to provide the crowd with a grandiose spectacle of well-matched and gruelling combats, interspersed with instances of the most gratuitous killing. It was essential, over the long day in the arena, to maintain the crowd's level of acute cardiac adrenaline, and that could never have been left to chance. The crowd would swiftly turn against any "editor" who failed to provide them with a sufficiently intricate neural thrill coupled to the unrefined butchery which they craved; any badly-managed spectacle would usually result, at the end of the day, in the "editor" himself facing public disembowelment and simultaneous crucifixion in the centre of the arena, as a suitable compensation offered to the restive crowd by its emperor for lax or disappointing entertainment. The gladiators were informed of the running order and combat pairings several days in advance, at their barracks, in order to give them the opportunity to thoroughly bugger their opponent into subjugation as a prelude to the more murderous part of the confrontation. So, while the charade of the drawing of lots went on, the gladiators would look at one another with raised, blasé eyebrows, while the gullible crowd waited with baited breath.

After the combat pairings had been announced to the crowd, drawing from it gasped exclamations of pleasure or frustration, the

gladiators would make one final processional circuit of the arena, before the combats started. A nervous gladiator making his first appearance would often involuntarily glance upwards, towards the high tiers of the arena, and see endless swathes of plebeian scum with their faces contorted in anticipation of the carnage to come; this was invariably a mistake, since the sight of that moronically salivating human debris would unfailingly terrify the young gladiator, coating his face with a sweat of abject fear, and ensuring that he would become the moribund combatant, unceremoniously carried out from the arena, feet-first and open-arteried, within the next few minutes. The more experienced and nonchalant gladiators knew never to look up at the crowd until their bout was over, by which time everything would be settled, and they would either be dead on the ground or else at the receiving end of a momentary torrent of exhilarating adulation. Finally, two of the gladiators would step forward. After a prolonged session of eye-to-eye glaring as they circled each other's fast-breathing bodies, their feet kicking up the earth and dust of the arena as though in utter derision of their opponent, the two gladiators finally closed in on one another and the combat began.

Not all combats were evenly matched. Often, to give the crowd a brutal sensory rush of the most invigorating kind, and to rapidly moisten its collective sexual organs in preparation for the more virtuoso performances to come, the day's bouts would commence with several examples of pure atrocity. A grizzled old gladiator with a hundred victories under his belt would calmly face a beardless, inexperienced gladiator who, only a short time before, had been herding pigs in the Calabrian hills, prior to receiving "the true call" to Rome. The young gladiator would make a show of curling his lip in derision at his relentlessly advancing opponent, and would execute a textbook defence with his shield, but the elderly gladiator would know just the right moment to feint to one side, exposing the young gladiator's throat to attack as he attempted to counter his opponent's ruse. In the very same second that the young gladiator realised that he had been tricked, he would find the blade of his adversary's sabre had been embedded six inches into his gullet. Few of those combats were offered for the arbitration of the emperor's thumb, since they had their place in the day's programme as foregone conclusions. The expression of the young gladiator's eyes would metamorphose in an instant from defiance to a look of total incredulity as the indented blade of his opponent's sword severed every major neck artery in a skilled sawing motion, sending vast gouts and spurts of arterial blood in carefully choreographed patterns around the arena. A skilled gladiator could divest his opponent of fifty per cent of his total blood content in the space of five seconds, but the mark of a truly top-rank

gladiator was the ability to direct that pumping blood-flow into aesthetic configurations: the name of the emperor could be spelled out on the sand and dirt of the arena floor, and alongside it, the shape of the imperial Roman eagle itself would appear in black-red lines of blood. The young gladiator would then discover that, with the final adept movement of his artful opponent, he had been completely decapitated. The ultimate test of his adversary's skill would be to make the severed head fall to the ground in such a way that its position exactly dotted the single "i" of the revered name "Caligula", inscribed in blood. In the few seconds before the blissful unconsciousness of death set in, it only remained for the lips of the young gladiator's severed head to silently mouth the emperor's name, while the headless body itself slowly slumped to the ground in a blood-sodden tangle of limbs. The crowd would experience a moment of soaring neural ecstasy as they watched the young gladiator's summary execution, but that gratuitous sensation rapidly diminished, and they would begin to whistle and hoot for more punishing demonstrations of slaughter.

The combats then began in earnest. In many of the pairings, the weapons at one gladiator's disposal would necessarily put him on the defensive, so that he had to keep parrying his opponent's sword blows with his shield, until the moment came when the sheer intensity of those blows had exhausted the opponent. The defensive gladiator could then reverse his strategy and advance, charging down his fatigued opponent and gaining the upper hand. The crowd would follow every nuanced twist and turn of the combat, entranced, emitting collective exclamations, gasps of amazement, grunts of indignation and screams of approval as the bout progressed. In other, more evenly matched permutations of weaponry, the gladiators would struggle for long minutes on end in an intricate exchange of sword thrusts and counter-movements, until one proficient or unexpected blow would deeply penetrate flesh, with a sudden hissing sound that the crowd knew and loved. The wounded gladiator would then sit back on one heel with his eyes fixed on the ground; his adversary positioned his sword at an angle against the exposed throat. The vital moment had arrived for the imperial adjudication, and all eyes in the arena turned towards the emperor.

The emperor's thumb was the most crucial and most capricious organ in the entire arena. If the combat had come to an abrupt conclusion, the emperor would often be caught with his thumb, together with the rest of his fist, embedded in the anus of an exquisite young slave brought from Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, where civilization had originated and muscular rectal elasticity was highly prized. The emperor would then have to

retrieve his thumb at short notice, much to his dismay; such interruptions would usually provoke a psychotic fit of imperial petulance that led to a firmly down-turned thumb and the gladiator's immediate demise, whatever the degree of courage he had displayed in the combat. But, on most occasions, the emperor would meticulously gauge the mood of the crowd before making his decision. That mood could never be judged in advance, and because of the crowd's integral perversity, it could often take unexpected forms: the most inept or cowardly gladiator could receive collective roars calling for his reprieve, while a gladiator who had shown mettle of the highest order could dissolve into sobs of anguish as he heard the crowd braying in unison for his demise: "*Jugula! Jugula!*" It was invariably the lowest human dross on the upper tiers of the arena who determined the entire crowd's decision, and the deviance of the plebeian scum's verdict would often result from their having been too distant, poised high above the arena, to have seen exactly what had happened in a particular bout; occasionally, too, they were unsighted or distracted by wildly copulating figures who blocked their perspective on the action below. Ultimately, though, the mood of the crowd remained enigmatic and inexplicable, almost mystical in its contrary judgements and their vocal manifestation.

The emperor acquiesced on most occasions to the crowd's mass verdict, however bizarre or illogical it might appear to be; at such moments, an attempt by the emperor to overrule the ferocious will of the crowd might well result in an uncontrollable riot that would have seen him floating face-down in the river Tiber, minus his majestic testicles, before nightfall. But on the occasions when the crowd hesitated, or vocalized a split decision, the emperor would seize the opportunity to exert his own perverse authority. He would allow his thumb to waver in a horizontal hold for minutes on end, each slightest tremor eliciting gasps from the crowd's one hundred thousand gaping mouths. Then, he would suddenly twist it upwards or downwards as though impelled by a definitive muscular spasm. It was divine will in operation. The gladiator who received a negative decision always took the imperial verdict in good heart, and, still sitting back on one heel, now nonchalantly tilted his chin up to the left, baring his pulsing artery to the victor, inviting him to slice through it. He would also tightly grip the victor's muscled thigh with both hands to steady himself with one final carnal gesture, and then nod his head. The victor would gruffly return the nod, and execute the blow in one movement, providing a dignified and relatively painless death. The expiring gladiator would tense his grip on his opponent's thigh in a momentary, orgasmic paroxysm, then release it and pivot backwards to sit down, his arms folded and his throat unleashing great spurts of

blood, calmly waiting to die.

However, the emperor was sometimes faced with more intricate decisions and dilemmas at the termination of gladiatorial bouts. If the two gladiators were evenly matched, forty or even fifty minutes of gruelling but inconclusive combat could pass by, and the crowd would grow increasingly restless at the lack of a lethal resolution. Neither of the gladiators would want to subjugate himself before the other, since they knew that such an entrenched combat would ultimately have alienated the crowd, which required a steady regime of at least three eviscerations and two decapitations per hour.

Finally, the emperor himself would have to step in to call a halt to the combat, by formally accusing both gladiators of the crime of “professional tedium”; they would then face one another and, at a signal from the emperor, simultaneously cut one another’s throats and fall dead together. The insoluble dilemma posed by this outcome was that the victorious gladiator of a combat pair was invariably required to remain in the arena and immediately fight one further bout; when no victor survived, this was impossible. If it transpired that the locked gladiators were among his favourites, the exasperated emperor could simply gesture dismissively at the combatants, ordering them to suspend their bout until a later date, and then throw bags of low-denomination coins among the plebeian detritus in order to distract their attention from such a breach of protocol.

A less intractable dilemma for the emperor occurred when a gladiator, usually on one of his first outings in the arena, would lose his nerve completely and run away from his opponent, battering with his fists on the unscalably high barriers which divided the scowling and hissing crowd from the blood-reeking combat surface. Only one outcome was conceivable in such a situation. The crowd would curse and murmur to one another: “*Hoc habet*” – “He’s had it”. The emperor would nod brusquely, and the disgraced gladiator’s opponent discreetly stepped away to one side. The crowd grew hushed, and then into the arena strode a golden-costumed dwarf of appalling hideousness. He belonged to a remote hill tribe on the eastern edge of Armenia that had developed an astral level of brutality to compensate for their stunted growth and freakish appearance, the result of millennia of inbreeding. The condemned gladiator would blanch at the array of weapons brandished with an ultimate sophistication by the approaching dwarf. The gladiator’s abject screams would then resonate far beyond the arena, echoing through the city and even the surrounding countryside, and after ten minutes, he would find himself reduced to minuscule cubes of hot flesh scattered over the dirt of the arena. The crowd watched the lethal display in awed silence, and then applauded respectfully as the dwarf urinated on the flayed human

cubes and serenely retired from view.

After each bout of combat, a bald-headed and nightmarish figure, the “carrion man”, clothed in tight-fitting black leather and carrying a long-handled silver hammer and a burning poker, entered the arena. He ritually pressed the poker against the sexual organs of the defeated gladiator to determine whether he was alive or dead. If the gladiator screamed, he was alive. If he remained silent, he was dead, and the “carrion man” would strike his forehead with the silver hammer to take possession of his soul, which the grim figure was charged with transporting to hell. On the occasions when a gladiator had received a debilitating wound which had failed to kill him but prevented him from continuing the bout, he would be unceremoniously removed from the arena, on a stretcher pulled by a pony, down to a subterranean annex known as the “finishing-off room”. There, despite the gladiator’s protests that he now preferred to continue his fight or wanted to be returned home to the barracks, a hulking horse-butcher hired specially for the purpose would eventually appear, and soon put paid to the maimed combatant with a few well-aimed strokes of a cleaver.

It was essential that no loose ends were allowed to subsist from the day’s work in the arena. The end of each day of the gladiatorial games had to be marked by a zero degree of carnage, in order for the following day’s combat to begin with a pristine aura of renewed purity. Hundreds of slaves abruptly appeared in the arena and hosed the bloody sand clean with floods of perfumed spring water; other slaves rapidly sorted out the severed body parts and assigned them to a collection of jute sacks. At the same time, the victorious gladiators would gather to salute the emperor once more, and then exited from the arena with the thunderous cacophony of the crowd’s adulation still pulsing in their heads; they retraced their steps through the labyrinthine tunnels echoing with the now-desperate cries of the criminal prisoners and the religious cultists, and returned to their dressing room, where they would grunt at their fellow survivors. The emperor himself would sometimes call by on his way back to the palace to congratulate them, usually arriving at the point when they had removed their battered costumes of leather and were standing naked within a trickling sheath of steaming blood.

He would distribute a few gold pieces to their eager hands. After his departure, the gladiators – abruptly scum once again – would anonymously sidle out from a rear exit of the empty amphitheatre and slowly make their way back to their barracks.

Many other acts of slaughter also constellated the games.

These took three main forms: duels between criminals, the massacre of dissidents and religious fanatics, and chariot combats. On

some occasions, these spectacles of out-and-out butchery were segregated from the gladiatorial combats, which still possessed some faint residue of their original sacred purpose and needed to be cordoned off from the more profane acts of carnage. As a result, the gladiatorial bouts and other events were then staged on alternate days of the games. However, this arrangement remained eminently flexible, with the gladiatorial combats often being evenly interspersed with other entertainments. And if the day's gladiatorial bouts had failed to yield the required death toll and if the desired lake of arterial blood had not collected on the ground of the arena, then all of the gladiators would be summarily dismissed with one obscene gesture of the emperor's fist, and it would be time for the real slaughter to start.

For the crowd, the criminal duels could prove as exhilarating in their way as the most skilful gladiatorial bouts. The overriding factor which provided the fascination of those duels was that they could never ultimately be won. Every duel comprised a gruelling fight to the death, and the victor of one pairing immediately had to confront a new opponent. Even if he was totally exhausted from the previous duel, only a matter of a few seconds would elapse before the next combatant was catapulted into the arena from the subterranean cages of the amphitheatre. Nothing convulsed the crowd with greater ecstasy than a demonstration of the futility of human existence – it served to give their ephemeral moment of pleasure on the tiers of the arena a thrilling edge, which always manifested itself in desperate acts of multiple copulation. Sperm spurted in greater intensity during the criminal duels than during any other element of the games. Even the young spectators who disdained sexual interaction while watching the gladiatorial combats – believing them to form a spectatorial experience that demanded total concentration – would reach frenziedly for the nearest penis and jam it into their anuses, as soon as the brutality of the criminal duels had whipped them up to a dangerous level of neural oblivion. The only certain outcome of the criminal duels was that they would leave no survivors. Their participants fought only to live on for a further few minutes, at most a few hours, and that brief extension to their lives would take the form of punishing hand-to-hand fighting of the most ferocious, inhuman kind.

Many species of criminal found themselves condemned to fight in the arena, but the overwhelming majority of the participants belonged to the plebeian scum of the Empire. This factor, too, added to the elation which the massed ranks of human dross in the crowd experienced, since they simultaneously gloried in the deaths of the criminals and also empathized with them – only a slender thread separated the crowd from the criminals down below. The legal code of

the Empire had been conceived with such arbitrariness that offenders who had committed exactly the same crime could find themselves either condemned to death in the arena or else released with a mild caution, depending on the whim of the judge who heard their case and the bribes or sexual favours they could offer him.

Anything from urinating in a public place to sporting an objectionable amount of facial hair could land the offender in lethal trouble. In the rural provinces, incest and sex with minors loomed temptingly large in every peasant's mind; such crimes merited immediate condemnation in Tingitana, on the south-western fringes of the Empire, whereas in the moronic northern province of Belgica, no one would dream of considering such everyday acts as criminal or even reprehensible. Criminal fodder for the arena's atrocities arrived from every far corner of the Empire, but many of the citizens of Rome itself also fell victim to the impenetrable twists of the legal code as it was applied under the Julio-Claudian regimes.

Occasionally, hapless senators and merchants became mixed in with the common scum in the criminal duels, especially if the emperor had seized their fortunes and wanted to subject them to a final humiliation before they exited from the cursed mortal world. The Empire's prisons remained almost empty for centuries, their contents dispatched for public disposal in the arena.

The criminal duels, like the gladiatorial combats, were organized by "editors", whose principal dilemma lay in ensuring that the duels would achieve the requisite level of eyeball-to-eyeball brutality. Nobody in the crowd wanted to see the two combatants simply throw their jagged swords to the ground and refuse to fight, or run screaming in terror to the edges of the arena to plead for mercy from the howling audience. One solution was to make the criminals ingest a powerful hallucinogen shortly before they entered the arena; this provoked a searing narcotic frenzy which gave each combatant the paranoid delusion that their opponent was the embodiment of Death itself, who had come to claim them. In all cases, the combination of fear and the feral rage induced by the hallucinogen propelled the two duelling criminals into an amateurish but engrossing fight. Other incentives were offered to the more reluctant criminals: if they refused to fight and turned their backs on their opponents in disgust, attendants immediately began to lash them with whips and to thrust white-hot branding irons towards their sexual organs, until they finally turned back to face their adversaries.

But the crucial lure for the combatants remained the desire to stay alive, even just for a few more hellish minutes.

An endless stock of criminals was available in the arena's subterranea, and however rapidly the massacre progressed, more and

more wild-eyed figures, invariably naked and armed only with a rusty but razor-sharp sword, could be projected out into the gaze of the crowd. Since almost all of the criminals were untrained in the use of weapons, they would attempt to inflict as many deep wounds upon their adversaries as possible, often simply making mad, lumbering lunges. Sometimes, one crazed criminal would knock the other to the ground, then gouge out his eyes or insanely throttle him.

Unsuccessful contestants often ended up with their testicles between their teeth. The crowd loved the ludicrous criminal duels, since unlike the more predictable gladiatorial combats, there existed no set rules, no codes of conduct and no dignified deaths: it was utter annihilation executed in the most clumsy, bungling way imaginable – the equivalent in the Roman era to the no-budget exploitation film, preferred by its adherents to hackneyed and sanitized Hollywood product.

At the end of the duels, one combatant necessarily remained alive; in a few rare instances, a criminal who was particularly skilled in swordplay or driven by unstoppable ferocity could survive from end to end of the day's combat, notching up hundreds of kills. The crowd would usually spit out the most malevolent obscenities and derision at the criminals, but, if one criminal showed special resilience, the plebeian scum would gradually get behind him and begin to applaud him at each victory. In the face of imminent death, carried along by the vocal adulation of the crowd, the blood-spattered criminal would suddenly experience contrary sensations of hopelessness and euphoria. He would look upwards in dazed disbelief at the precipices of the arena's tiers, packed with endless swathes of slaving and copulating scum. High up, above the hundred thousand steaming human bodies, a patch of blue sky appeared to indicate the faint possibility of a reprieve. He would triumphantly throw his arms in the air, as though claiming the status of a victorious gladiator, and look with pleading eyes towards the emperor. But it was useless: he was already condemned. Once he had massacred his final criminal opponent, a silence would fall upon the arena. An eight-foot-tall gladiator would appear, wearing an enormous black metal helmet and full visor, and swinging a mighty two-handled axe around his head; he advanced rapidly upon the now-cowering criminal and cut him cleanly in two at waist or chest height, eliciting from the crowd a furious roar of ejaculatory exultation that ricocheted around the vast arena. The day's spectacle was over, and the satisfied crowd would be left with a final view of the arena strewn with several hundred ineptly butchered human carcasses. The survival rate of the criminal duels was absolute zero.

In the systematic decimation of the Empire's dissident elements

and its religious fanatics, the preferred instrument of death was the wild beast. Occasionally, as a special treat for the crowd, an emperor would also pit gladiators against the beasts. The massive operation of capturing great numbers of ravening animals to be used in the arena's spectacles eventually rendered entire species extinct, especially in the then-lush forests, mountains and plains of North Africa, whose fragile eco-systems became transformed into arid deserts as a result. Big cats and bears of every kind constituted the particular focus of the search, but the sight of unusual and previously unseen beasts in the arena always sent the crowd into unprecedented fits of adulation for the emperor, who regularly dispatched expeditions of tens of thousands of hunters to bring back such novelties. The gathering of wild beasts for use in the arena became a major industry, with vast shipments of caged animals arriving daily from the far corners of the Empire. They were housed in a zoo adjacent to the amphitheatre, where they were kept in a semi-starved state to ensure that they would be avid to rip the bodies of condemned dissidents and mystics into shards of bony pulp in the shortest possible timespan. From every part of Rome, the animals could be heard roaring away at night, and those terrifying howls were easily audible in the subterranean dungeons where the magicians, revolutionaries and cultists spent their final nights on earth, chained together and subject to torture and humiliation, whenever their brutal jailers felt the compulsion take hold of them to commit acts of sexual atrocity.

The logic of employing wild beasts in the wholesale massacring of the Empire's wide range of enemies lay precisely in the terror which they engendered in their victims, and in the openmouthed awe which their appearance in the arena inspired in the crowd's plebeian detritus. The animal used most frequently in the arena was the legendary Libyan lion: the most magnificent specimens of this mutant species grew to eleven feet in length, with enormous paws armed with razorsharp claws of sabre-size dimensions; even their engorged testicles were as large as a man's head. The Libyan lion was the ultimate killing machine, especially if deprived of its usual diet: in the wild, on the then-fertile terrain of the Idehan Marzuq, it could lay waste to two hundred wildebeests and ostriches at one sitting. Armies of slaves were expended in the capture of those majestic beasts – they were impervious to tranquillizer arrows, and the only way to subdue them was for a particularly handsome slave to present his shapely, exposed anus to the lion's mighty sexual apparatus; then, once the act of copulation (which invariably proved terminal for the unfortunate slave, due to unsustainable blood loss) reached its critical point and the lion was momentarily distracted, a gang of a hundred or more whooping slaves would wrestle the lion to the ground and throw a net

over it.

It was a delicate operation which often failed: the lion would escape again after making short work of decapitating the slaves with its monstrous maw. The captured lions could be pacified by feeding them with almost-infinite quantities of Armenian brandy, the addictive qualities of which put them into near-comatose trances of gurgling tranquillity and rendered them amenable to their long journey over the Mediterranean. But as soon as they reached the port of Ostia, at the mouth of the Tiber river, their intake of brandy would be abruptly ended, sending them into a state of ever-greater rampant fury which reached its pinnacle at the moment of their entrance into the arena.

It was essential for the well-being of the Empire that its enemies – everyone from dissidents and terrorists to zealous cultists and mystical fanatics of every kind – should make their exit in as undignified a way as possible, and the use of wild beasts provided the medium for that degradation. If the terrorists had been paired together in the same way as the criminal duels operated, the scope would have existed for all kinds of final statements of revolutionary vitriol to be yelled in the presence of the emperor and the gullible crowd. But, faced with an enraged and slaving Libyan lion approaching at maximum velocity, its saliva-spurting maw already open to sever its prey's neck, few dissidents retained the presence of mind to call for a mass uprising of the downtrodden plebeian scum against the oppressive yoke of the psychotic Julio-Claudian regime.

Most simply turned tail in terror and fled, thereby winning a millisecond of additional life before the lion caught up with them.

For the crowd, such displays of foregone slaughter only provided a modest amount of excitement, even when the dissidents were allowed to group together in gangs of ten and were given weapons with which to defend themselves. The starving lion still annihilated them instantly, ramming two or three protesting heads into its dripping buccal orifice at the same time. The purpose of the slaughter was purely to rid the Empire of its rebellious elements, and the crowd had to accept that and to wait patiently for the more satisfying entertainments of the day's programme to begin. The arena's cleaners, however, always preferred the bestial carnage above any other element of the games, since the lions left no human remains to clean up, preferring to gulp down every last scrap of cracked human bone and assiduously lick up the pools of blood.

The decimation by wild beasts of the captured members of the Teutonic hordes could present special difficulties, since those heavily-bearded and scarred primitives knew exactly how to defend themselves against most onslaughts. They were the denizens of the

vast Teutoburg forest, on the far side of the river Rhine, where the greatest-ever defeat of the Roman army took place in AD 9: three entire Roman legions had been mercilessly wiped out in an ambush within the glowering semi-darkness of the dripping forest, and the many thousands of dead bodies of the butchered Roman soldiers had, without exception, been defiled by the necrophiliac Teutons. The unlucky survivors of the battle were sexually tortured for years on end, with the captured Roman standards used as sex aids, before the devilish Teutons finally tired of their prisoners and killed them by bloody emasculation. The Battle of the Teutoburg Forest remained the Empire's own pre-eminent humiliation, and the sight of Teutonic prisoners in the arena invariably whipped the crowd into a frenzied fury. The problem was that the sturdy Teutonic fiends, many of whom stood over seven feet in height, were hard to kill. And they were supremely indifferent to the deadly situation they faced in the arena, obviously stomping around as though they owned the place, and directing obscene and provocative gestures at the crowd and even towards the emperor himself. Confronted with an assault by a crazed but lumbering bear, the unfazed Teuton would nonchalantly wait until the bear was breathing into his face, and then stun it with one mighty punch to the forehead, before strangling it to death. And as a lion or tiger leaped towards the Teutonic savage, he would suddenly thrust his fist into its open maw, grab its tongue, and twist it around sharply, thereby choking the beast to extinction. The only solution was to send into the arena those beasts which the Teutonic thugs had never seen before, and were unsure how to defend themselves against, such as Mediterranean bulls; charged by an enraged bull with its spiked horns aimed at their stomachs, the Teutons would soon find their intestines had been looped around their kneecaps.

In the massacre of the religious cultists, the potential existed for more compelling displays for the benefit of the atrocity-avid plebeian scum. The more resolute of the fanatics and magicians would stand their ground in the face of the approaching wild beast, loudly invoking their deity and insisting that the lion or other animal should be transformed into stone or dust. Few lions would be stalled by the cultists' imprecations, and would simply charge into the pompously proselytizing figures and tear them limb from limb. The only prisoners capable of halting a lion's onrush were the skilled magicians who knew how to execute a complex series of waving hand gestures and vocal expulsions that would instantaneously hypnotize the lion and render it docile. It would roll over onto its side, purring. The magician would then look around at the already moronically stupefied spectators and begin to direct the same effective hand gestures at the crowd itself. The spectacle's "editor" then had to act quickly,

unleashing a further ten lions into the arena; they would encircle the magician, making it impossible for him to mesmerize all of them at once, and the magician would soon discover that his head had been summarily ripped from his body: his final sensory experience would be the reeking stench of a lion's gulping gullet, and his last sight would be that of its pulsing, scarlet oesophagus. Among the more notable leaders of sects whose members were slaughtered in the arena was Pachrates, who habitually rode around on the back of a crocodile and once spent twenty-three years in a darkened room learning how to transform a doorbolt into a robot; and Plotinus, who famously had himself burnt alive in a heavily-advertised performance for which the spectators had to buy expensive tickets, and then reappeared some days later in the form of a snake. Part of the crowd's fascination with the spectacle of the martyrdom of fanatics stemmed from the fact that the uninspiring Roman gods themselves formed an amorphous, barely tangible collection; as a result, the bizarre range of religious sects – and the delusional hold they exerted on their adherents – intrigued the crowd, and even interested those authoritarian figures in charge of designing the Empire's power regime. After all, the most supremely bizarre and factional of the cultists' obsessions eventually came to be adopted as the Empire's official religion, in a cold strategy of power preservation that saw the emperor change his job-title to that of "pope", thereby preserving the corruption and atrocity of the Empire intact into the Dark Ages.

The chariot combats required a great degree of skill and training, and those criminals or dissidents condemned to pursue a career as a charioteer could survive for several years in their profession, if they mastered the strategies by which they could adroitly slice their opponent into several pieces, or else see him jettisoned from his chariot to crumple into a mangled mass of pounded bones. Enormous sabres were attached at horizontal angles to the chariots' wheels; a proficient charioteer would attempt, on one circuit of the arena, to knock his opponent out of his chariot by jolting against it from behind, and then, on his next circuit, to cut his adversary cleanly in two at waist level, as the dazed victim tried to stagger to his feet. The chariots would also crack against one other in ferocious splinterings of wood and metal, as the charioteers attempted to shatter one another's wheel axles. If the wheels broke off, the chariot catapulted into space; the foaming horses veered off in another direction while the charioteer tried to stay inside the rapidly crumbling box of wood in which he stood. This was called a "shipwreck". If he fell out of his chariot, the combatant faced certain death from being crushed under horse hooves or being exposed to the whipping sabres of oncoming chariots. But if he remained in his stalled chariot, he would then be

rapidly decapitated by a sword blow aimed by a passing charioteer. And the flimsy boxes in which the charioteers rode provided no protection in the event that the driver collided with the barrier which separated the track from the crowd, so that his body would be compacted at high speed against that wall, instantly disintegrating in a scarlet liquid pall of bloody pulp that splattered upwards and drenched the closest spectators. The spectators had to keep scanning the entire expanse of the arena's killing ground with their eyes, since a deluge of blood could appear anywhere, at any moment, as the twenty to thirty chariots thunderously made their invariable fourteen circuits of the track. The rare charioteer who managed to survive a crash at full tilt unscathed was soon pulled to his feet by his assistants, the "*agitatores*", and given a restorative drink made principally from the crushed dung of a wild boar, the recipe for which had been devised by the emperor himself. Then the charioteer, invigorated, was given a new chariot and immediately pushed back into the race.

A series of chariot combats often filled the very last day of one games, since they required extensive modifications to be made to the arena, with the demarcation of the race track around its edges.

But chariot combats also took place outside the arena, in a special stadium constructed solely for that purpose; it could accommodate three hundred thousand spectators, far exceeding the already vast capacity of the arena. And since the stadium was made of wood, it could be enlarged whenever the emperor judged that the chariot combats should be made even more spectacular, under the eyes of yet more of the insatiable plebeian scum of Rome. Around the stadium, hundreds of prostitutional huts sprang up, each catering to a different sexual deviancy; but the spectators also lost no opportunity to stage sessions of mass copulation and buggery on the tiers of the stadium itself, whenever the breakneck velocity of the chariot combats' murderous impacts pushed those spectators beyond their maximum neural threshold, into a pulsing sensory terrain where only multiple acts of lustful copulation with strangers could calm their rabid fever. The chariot combats attracted a very young audience who dressed stylishly for the occasion, in anticipation of the sexual furore in the stadium which was certain to result; the women wore bright robes which allowed their neighbours glimpses of aching-erect nipples and shaven, semen-leaking vulvas, while the men showed off their straining penises through intricate folds in their own robes.

But even so, the stadium for chariot combats lacked the compulsive aura of slaughter and fornication which the gladiatorial arena generated to white-heat intensity. The plebeian crowd was always contented to the utmost degree when the games took place within the echoing precipices of the arena: the undisputed domain of

the gladiator.

3. COMMODUS : IMPERIAL DELIRIUM

Over a century after the deification and slaughtering of Caligula, another god-emperor staged a reign which attempted to match the ferocious intensity of Caligula's grandiose and murderous era: Commodus. And Commodus's reign, above all, epitomized the obsession with the cult of the emperor as gladiator which had begun with Caligula. Like Caligula, Commodus ruled with psychotic abandon, allying himself with the crowd and treating the Senate with lethal contempt. And the most direct way to activate the pulsating neural elation of the crowd was for the emperor himself to take on the costume of the gladiator, and to receive the thunderous adulation of the plebeian masses as he circled the arena, throwing his arms in the air after a crushing victory over a mercilessly butchered opponent. Caligula had only ever appeared in the arena less than a hundred times, since his competing commitment to headlong debauchery demanded such a large part of his dutiful attention. But Commodus undertook many thousands of gladiatorial combats in the arena, and massacred beasts wholesale with a professional skill and commitment which the buggery-addled Caligula had never managed to achieve. Commodus succeeded in literally fusing together the arena with the palace, by majestically living in the arena itself and scrambling together the two brilliant destinies which convulsed the Roman Empire: those of the emperor and the gladiator.

Like Caligula, Commodus spent much of his childhood with the brutish Roman legions on the northern military front, along the Rhine and Danube rivers. In the century since Caligula's reign, much had changed in Rome itself – for one thing, the Julio-Claudian dynasty had expired in a crescendo of conspiracy, buggery and murderous excess, and the Antonine dynasty now held power – but on the northern frontiers of the Empire, the picture was dispiritingly similar. The rampaging Teutonic hordes still threatened to swarm across the Rhine and Danube to pillage and decimate Rome, and the emperors continued to formulate immense battle plans that would see the bestial Teutons defeated and ground into the dirt of their murky lands. Commodus's father, Marcus Aurelius, had been emperor since AD 161 and was noted for his sour demeanour and relentlessly grim view of human existence; he believed that he had missed his vocation, and that he should have been a philosopher rather than an emperor. In the swampland camps beside the Danube, surrounded by his boorish legionnaires and taunted by the obscenities that were incessantly hurled by the surly Teutons from the far side of the river, Marcus

Aurelius found solace by ensconcing himself in his tent and philosophising. He was especially pleased with his own theory of sex, which took him many years to formulate:

“Copulation is friction of the members and an ejaculatory discharge.” But when he attempted to share his brilliant wisdom with the unrefined legionnaires, they simply rolled their eyes. His son, Commodus, also found it hard to indulge his austere father’s vocational deficit and his dour view of an emperor’s responsibilities and mission. Commodus, from his early years, had desired the lavish splendour of imperial glory and the exhilarating mass carnage of the arena. But Marcus Aurelius was intent on pursuing his duties on the dank northern frontier, hoping that he would eventually be able to divide the savage Teutonic tribes and conquer their godforsaken lands, thereby annulling forever their threat to the Empire.

In AD 180, Marcus Aurelius and his generals were planning a final push over the Danube, intending to scorch their way northwards with an apocalypse of fire across the gloomy forests and plains of Germany, until they reached the Baltic sea. But Marcus Aurelius, then fifty-nine years of age, was exhausted from his long years of campaigning and fell fatally ill, having contracted the plague, which was rampant in northern Europe at the time. He called Commodus to his sickbed, and told him that he would soon assume imperial power. It was the first time in the entire history of the Empire that dynastic power was to pass directly from father to son; in every other instance, the sons of emperors had been brutally massacred or had died prematurely, usually poisoned by conspirators or even by their own parents. Although the dissolute and incipiently-psychotic Commodus was clearly poor material for the responsibility of imperial power, Marcus Aurelius could not miss the opportunity to prolong his dynasty. He instructed his son to follow the advice of the Senate, and to preserve the power system under which the wealthy Roman merchants and aristocrats subjugated the poverty-ridden plebeian scum. He also made his son promise that he would work unceasingly to enlarge the boundaries of the Empire in every direction. He then issued a proclamation, announcing that his heir was “the Rising Sun of the New World”, and, his favourite works of philosophy by his bedside, he settled down to die. But the plague was an excruciatingly slow death, gradually rotting the internal organs and transforming the face into a pulsing mass of black boils that would suddenly emit great geysers of stinking orange pus, spattering everyone in the vicinity. Commodus finally grew so sick of looking at Marcus Aurelius’s face and trying to dodge the ejaculations of pus, and so impatient to set out for Rome to receive the crowd’s adulation, that – after sending everyone from his father’s tent and putting on a pair of thick protective gloves – he

throttled the emperor into oblivion. It was 17 March AD 180. Although it was evident that Marcus Aurelius, with his protruding tongue and bulging eyes, had been murdered, most of his generals decided to follow his wish that his son should succeed him, and they proclaimed Commodus emperor. Commodus's first imperial act was to announce his father's deification.

Commodus was nineteen years of age at the time of his accession; born in AD 161, he had been the survivor of male twins, his brother having died young. The birth of the imperial twins had been celebrated in Rome as promising the arrival of an unparalleled age of glory; when one twin died, that promise abruptly metamorphosed into a glowering malediction. Commodus was now eager to reach Rome as soon as possible. But, much to the new emperor's exasperation, he had to spend the first few months of his reign still holed up in the muddy, rain-drenched military camps, negotiating a truce with the grunting Teutonic chieftains. He had decided to abandon his father's grand scheme to invade the dank Teutonic homeland. One by one, the malodorous savages passed through his tent in their woolly costumes, to offer their obeisance to him. To his horror, each chieftain expected the emperor to bugger him, to seal their agreement, and Commodus was kept busy for five months as the thousands of sub-chieftains and deputy-chieftains from the various tribal factions kept on coming. And by the time Commodus finally dealt with the last of the slaving Teutons, in September AD 180, new conflicts had already broken out along the Danube frontier, and it seemed that the truce would have to be sealed all over again from scratch. In the end, Commodus, his precarious neural balance now reeling in every direction, decided that he had simply had enough, and he abruptly set off for Rome with most of the legions, leaving the frontier still simmering.

The plebeian scum greeted Commodus's arrival in Rome with delirious celebrations; on 22 October AD 180, the new emperor entered the city at the head of an immense procession intended to mark the triumphant conclusion of the war against the rampaging Teutonic hordes. The crowd had despised the aloof Marcus Aurelius, especially detesting the way in which he had protected the wealth and power of the merchants and aristocrats, at the plebeian mass's expense. Marcus Aurelius had also opposed the gladiatorial combats and bestial massacres in the arena which formed the very centre of existence for the urban scum; the great arena had even been closed down, and had partially fallen into dereliction. After he had witnessed the crowd's adulation, Commodus magnanimously promised that they would witness spectacles in the arena which would put even the Julio-Claudian extravaganzas of sensory excess into the shade. In his initial dealings with the Senate, Commodus took a sly approach; like his true

mentor, Caligula, he began by flattering the senators and promising to rule wisely. But the senators had so often found themselves being duped, and then butchered, by a new emperor that they suspiciously viewed the affable Commodus with deep distaste. And, in appearance, Commodus indeed offered a revolting sight: he was a freak of nature, with an immense, tubular swelling of blood-congested blue flesh at his groin that made his robes protrude by over twelve inches. The avid plebeian scum speculated whether Commodus's bulging robe hid a permanently-erect, magnificent imperial phallus, but they were disappointed to learn that the emperor's freakish appendage was located just above his much more modest sexual organ.

Commodus – who by now was rumoured to be keeping both male and female harems, each some 300 in number, for his private debauches – ordered the imperial engineers to renovate and enlarge the capacity of the arena. He also commanded that one entire side of the arena be transformed into an extension of his palace; sumptuous suites of rooms were installed as a kind of terrace, with their balconies looking directly over the killing zone. This enabled Commodus to literally live in the arena for most of his time. In the first years of his reign, he hired the services of the greatest gladiatorial trainers of the era, together with the most skilled hunters and chariot racers. When the arena was empty at night and the plebeian scum had dispersed, Commodus practiced incessantly under the illumination of great braziers arranged around the arena's tiers. The gladiatorial trainers imparted all of the intricate skills of their profession to him. Commodus undertook seven years of intensive work, for eighteen hours each day, his training suspended only when the arena was occupied by the magnificent spectacles which he provided for the plebeian scum. Before dawn, he would drive his chariot at high speed through the empty streets of the city, learning to effortlessly negotiate the sharp turns that often saw less adroit charioteers crushed into bloody pulp in the arena. Entire species of rare beasts imported from North Africa were decimated in Commodus's practice sessions, as he learned how to spear animals from a safe distance. By the summer of AD 187, Commodus had developed a proficiency in the arena that made him the equal of most professional gladiators; only the protrusion from his groin would have disqualified him from pursuing a successful gladiatorial career if he had not been emperor. Whereas Caligula's short reign gave him little time to hone his skills in the arena, Commodus was able to carefully refine his expertise under specialist tuition, until, in October AD 187, at the age of twenty-six, he was finally ready to step publicly into the arena, under the gaze of the crowd, and to receive its ferocious adulation.

Commodus arranged a spectacular series of games to mark his own

entry into the arena. The massed plebeian scum jammed its way towards the upper tiers of the arena at dawn, suffocating and trampling many thousands of unlucky would-be spectators as they surged through the gates. After a build-up lasting the entire day, and with the frenetic crowd propelled into a collective state of near-apoplectic neural overdrive, Commodus finally appeared in the arena. Under the gaze of two hundred thousand rapt eyes, he contemptuously cast off his imperial robe of purple and gold silk; beneath it, he wore the austere leather costume of the gladiator. He then forced all of the senators to kneel before him and reverentially intone the words: "You are the master, you are the victor, and you always will be." Then, the ten greatest gladiators of the day formed a line in front of Commodus, and he instructed the crowd to choose which of them he should face as his first opponent. Fearful that they would see their adored emperor being immediately decapitated, the plebeian scum shouted out the name of the weakest among the gladiators; but, once they realised that Commodus had followed Caligula's brilliant strategy of allowing his opponent to use only a wooden dagger against his own razorsharp sword, they instead roared out the name of the strongest. After circling the nonplussed gladiator for several minutes, Commodus butchered him, then wheeled on the spot, his arms in the air, as the adulatory roar of the ecstatic crowd ricocheted its way in blistering sonic bursts around the arena. As the crowd exited through the arena's gates, which had only just been cleared of the human debris caused by that morning's crush, great showers of golden coins were thrown to them, and once again, thousands of the abject plebeian scum found themselves being mashed to unrecognizable bloody tissue under the resulting stampede.

On the second day of the games, Commodus decided to demonstrate his prowess in hunting, and slaughtered over a hundred bears in two hours, accurately hurling huge spears at the bellowing beasts from behind a human shield of slaves. Whenever he grew tired, a female Nubian slave, naked and over seven feet in height, would rush over to him with a revitalizing drink of chilled honey wine, served in a cup designed in the shape of a mace. Sometimes, he would display his hunting skills from one of the majestic balconies at the side of the arena that formed part of his palace. From this terrace, Commodus would launch javelins towards carefully positioned beasts, invariably felling them at the first attempt. He began one session of carnage by slaughtering five hippopotami, two elephants, eighteen rhinoceroses, and one giraffe within the space of an hour. After a short break, he then undertook the ultimate test of his hunting skills, massacring one hundred leopards with one hundred javelins, never once missing his target. Then, as a sort of reward to please the

enraptured crowd, a swarm of terrified ostriches was released into the arena, running wildly from one side to the other; Commodus shot hundreds of crescent-headed arrows from a jewel-encrusted bow, cleanly severing the ostriches' heads from their bodies; the crowd howled in delirium as they watched the decapitated ostriches continue to career around the arena, their necks now spouting pulsing plumes of blood. Within twenty minutes, Commodus had annihilated every last bird.

But it was the gladiatorial combats that proved to be Commodus's abiding obsession, and over the last four years of his reign, he notched up twelve thousand kills. Apart from allowing his opponent only to use a wooden dagger, Commodus rigorously followed all of the arcane regulations governing gladiatorial combats. He continued to give the crowd the right to choose his adversaries, and insisted on being paid enormous professional sums by the aristocrats who patronized the games. All over the Roman Empire, statues were erected to the imperial gladiator Commodus, noting his death toll and his ability to wield his sword with his left hand, which was viewed as a sign of special distinction. But Commodus could become jealous if he believed that his supremacy in the arena was being threatened by anyone else, and over the final years of his reign, hundreds of hunters, charioteers and gladiators all found themselves being summarily executed when they attracted the crowd's attention to the detriment of the adulation shown to Commodus. The emperor's career in the arena formed an extraordinary achievement. Like Caligula, he had managed to comprehensively debase and pervert the entire status of imperial power – the gladiator was regarded as inhabiting the very lowest layer of Roman society. But, ultimately, Caligula's achievements in the arena surpass those of Commodus, since the almost infinite replication of Commodus's appearances and killings in the arena, together with his obsessive citations of Caligula's own atrocities (Commodus was certainly the first post-modern Roman emperor), finally diluted and diffused the scandalous impact inflicted upon the Empire by the spectacular vision of the emperor as gladiator.

In his rare excursions outside the arena, Commodus cut a striking figure. He declared early in his reign that he would never appear in public unless he was covered in blood, and made sure that his robe of purple and gold silk stank with human and animal blood whenever he visited the Senate to terrorize its members. He also wore a crown of solid gold, inlaid with precious gems collected from all over the Empire and even beyond its frontiers. Without warning, Commodus would stride into the Senate's meeting hall late in the evening, fresh from his day's kills, holding the severed head of an ostrich or flamingo in one hand, and his blood-caked sword in the other; then, he would

stand in silence in front of the massed senators and glare murderously at them, scanning each face in turn.

Occasionally, he would switch his gaze from the intact human head of a senator to the severed bird's head, with the connection made explicit by his glowering eyes. The vast majority of the craven senators whimpered in fear, while a scattering of more hardy characters returned Commodus's stare. Then, the emperor would abruptly break into a malevolent grin, as though the whole performance had been intended to taunt its audience, rather than to gauge which of the senators would be next in line for butchery. As with the games hosted by Caligula, Commodus's spectacles of gladiatorial carnage for the benefit of the plebeian masses were principally funded by the summary murder of wealthy senators and merchants, on one concocted pretext or another, followed by the confiscation of their entire assets. Over the course of his reign, Commodus's already-dire relations with the Senate deteriorated relentlessly. He brandished about a long hit-list of condemned senators, like those drawn up by Caligula. A few of the exasperated senators formulated a plot to assassinate the emperor, and entrusted one of their youngest members, Quintianus, with the mission of stabbing Commodus on his next visit to the Senate. But the verbose Quintianus became so over-excited when he confronted the unsuspecting Commodus that he decided to make a speech before delivering the fatal blow. He waved his dagger in the air and began,

"We, the noble Senate, have decided to be rid of the vile tyrant Commodus..." By the time that he had reached the end of his fatuous declamation, Commodus's bodyguards had overpowered him, and he was taken away to suffer the most excruciating death (by systematic torture and gradual emasculation) ever inflicted in the history of the Empire. After that, Commodus refused even to acknowledge the existence of the Senate, other than as a focus for his strategies of income-generating slaughter. He naturally became increasingly paranoid about plots against him, and condemned his wife Crispina and his sister Lucilla to exile and then death for a suspected conspiracy. Other than his excursions to the Senate, Commodus almost never left his home in the arena; when he did reluctantly have to return to his main palace, usually to preside at lavish feasts honouring visiting despots who were allied to Rome, he appeared irascible, and blurted out exclamations and insults with a saliva-spattering incoherence that rivalled Caligula's own style of speech. On those forays, Commodus had a totally vacant and distracted expression; he was an exile in his own palace, and the alien world outside the arena barely existed for him at all.

Soon, Commodus had concluded that his own majestic body

constituted and encompassed the entire Roman Empire, and that the imperial domain needed to be re-named accordingly. He began with Rome and its inhabitants, deciding that he would now become the creator of the city by instituting a total return to zero (clearly an inspiration for Pol Pot's experiments with Cambodia in the 1970s).

In AD 190, the city's very existence was cancelled out on all documents, and Commodus proclaimed that he was himself the new founder of Rome, with the city now bearing the name "Commodus Colony"; its full name actually became "The Fortunate, Immortal and Universal Colony of the Earth, Created by Commodus", but the city's inhabitants preferred the shorter name. They themselves became known, along with the rest of the Empire's population, as the "Commodians". The ships which brought the essential grain from North Africa to Rome were named "The Fleet of Commodus", and the army become "The Legions of Commodus". With an advanced sense of irony, the emperor re-named the Senate "The Lucky Senate of Commodus". Once he had started his great work of reinventing the Empire, the elated Commodus deliriously issued proclamations in every direction. All space and time now owed its existence to him: he re-named the months of the year after the magnificent titles which he had awarded to himself, and declared that he had instituted a glorious new age of infinite happiness for all of the plebeian scum of the Empire. It was called "The Golden Age of Commodus".

Between his commitments to gladiatorial combat in the arena and his frenzied re-naming of the entire contents of the Empire, Commodus had no time left at all for the practical business of running his imperial domain. He delegated its administration entirely to his cronies, whom he chose at random and allowed a free hand. His favourite administrator was a former slave named Cleander, who devised an intricate system of corrupt administration exclusively devoted to generating wealth for himself and Commodus; the Empire was squeezed dry, to its furthest corners, and its wealth channelled into Commodus's arena and Cleander's dissolute lifestyle. Cleander also became supreme commander of the Roman legions but, because of the rigorous military policies set in place by Marcus Aurelius, little trouble actually occurred in the Empire during most of Commodus's reign. In AD 184, the rampaging Scots had tried to overrun the now-conquered Britain, but they were soon repulsed by the brutish Roman legions stationed there, and Commodus seized the opportunity to claim for himself the noble title "Britannicus", which had previously been held by Caligula. The only other trouble came in the following year, from the direction of Gaul, which had become a lawless colony, relentlessly criss-crossed by murderous hordes of pillaging brigands. One of the brigands' leaders, a charismatic former soldier named

Maternus who had deserted from his legion, decided that he would travel to Rome with a few of his trusted associates in order to assassinate Commodus, with the aim of wreaking mayhem. But, once he had arrived in the city and was choosing the best moment to slay the emperor, the courageous Maternus was abruptly betrayed by one of his associates; Commodus himself presided over the spectacle of Maternus being dragged into the arena to be eviscerated by a pack of ravening Libyan lions. Otherwise, the Empire ran smoothly, its sole purpose now being to generate income for Cleander and Commodus.

However, in AD 190, Commodus abruptly had Cleander slaughtered on a caprice, and from that moment on, nobody at all was in control of the Empire, which careered wildly towards calamity at full speed.

Unlike Caligula, who was prepared to give his life for the divine glory of buggery and incest, Commodus now had little time available for sexual activity of any kind, and certainly never considered fathering an heir to prolong the Antonine dynasty. After dispatching his wife, Crispina, to exile and death, he had a beautiful mistress named Marcia, but totally neglected her; apart from brief sessions of cursory buggery with burly wrestlers in the imperial baths, his attention remained exclusively fixed on the arena's killing zone.

In the final part of his reign, Commodus resolved that he would transform himself into a living god, as Caligula had done. He had the brilliant idea that, by becoming a god, he would not need to tear himself away from the arena to copulate with Marcia in order to produce an heir, since he himself would now live and reign forever.

Ever since he had become emperor, he had identified himself with the god Hercules, often appearing in the arena in the costume associated with that deity: he dressed in a lion's skin and aggressively wielded an enormous club. But Commodus now decided to try something more sophisticated. He was well aware of one of the myriad of bizarre religious cults that were proliferating across the Empire from Judea, "Christianity"; the idea it promoted of having only one god (rather than a swarm of them) appealed to Commodus, since he believed that the potential for corruption, manipulation and devastation contained in such a system of monotheism perfectly suited his own future plans. He therefore declared himself to be the monotheistic fountainhead of the entire universe, responsible for creating the Empire, the world, and all of space and time. But, unlike the magnificent self-deification of Caligula, the metamorphosis of Commodus into a living god failed to enthuse the plebeian scum of Rome in the way he had hoped. They simply wanted to see their emperor in the act of butchering the maximum number of human beings and wild beasts in the shortest possible time, while they

elatedly crammed the tiers of the arena and unleashed a devastating sonic wave of adulation at the never-ending torrents of blood.

On 1 January AD 192, Commodus was due to appear in his gladiatorial costume before the subjugated Senate to receive its highest honours. But, the night before, he abruptly fell victim to his mistress Marcia, who had grown angry at his neglect of her.

Commodus was always too busy becoming a god and slaughtering untold human lives to give her the sexual satisfaction she needed. In a fit of rage, she fed Commodus a piece of meat that had been dipped in a powerful soporific solution. Then, while the emperor lay sprawled in a semi-coma in the steam room of the imperial baths, Marcia persuaded one of her lovers, a brawny wrestler named Narcissus, to strangle Commodus. Narcissus then crept up behind Commodus and brutally garrotted him; Marcia had the satisfaction of finally seeing the blood-congested penis of the agonized Commodus swell up to its maximum purple elongation, before unleashing a torrent of terminal semen into her mouth as the gurgling emperor expired in a burning neural flash of orgasm.

The relieved survivors of the Senate gathered on the following morning and gloatingly cursed the memory of the deceased emperor for all eternity, just as their predecessors had done after the spectacular demise of Caligula. They decided that the body of Commodus should be attached to a rope and dragged at high speed through the city streets behind his own chariot, then thrown into the river Tiber as an admonition to the distraught plebeian scum (although, in the end, nobody could summon up the effort to actually do this). They issued a proclamation: “Let the memory of Commodus the parricide, the gladiator be obliterated! Let the statues of the gladiator be destroyed, and his memory wiped out for all time!” However, it would be the Senate, rather than the assassinated emperor, who would be forgotten: Commodus remained an invaluable source of inspiration to dictators and tyrants throughout the following two millennia, providing a prescient – and forever contemporary – revelation of the power of excess.

Commodus had spectacularly succeeded in utterly debasing and perverting the Roman Empire, and in reducing the revered position of emperor to that of dirt. On 1 January AD 192, the conspirators in Commodus’s murder offered imperial power to one Publius Helvius Pertinax. 87 days later, the 66-year-old would-be tyrant was butchered to bloody shreds of gristle by the collective sword-blows of 300 soldiers. While his severed head was still impaled on a stake, in full view of the plebeian scum, the role of emperor was being summarily auctioned-off to the highest bidder.

The prizewinner, an elderly and debauched senator named Didius

Julianus, had even less time to celebrate his acquisition of imperial dominion over the entire civilized world. Within 9 weeks, he too had been gratuitously slaughtered. The next emperor, Septimus Severus, reigned from AD 193 to 211, eventually dying of illness – but not before there had been several attempts to murder him by his own son, Caracalla, who became another of the top-ranking monstrous tyrants in the history of the Empire.

Caracalla and his brother, Geta, became joint-emperors; within 11 months, Caracalla had brutally assassinated his hapless sibling. The first of the two principal atrocities which marked Caracalla's reign was the mass execution, without trial or cause, of all of his brother's supporters. In the early months of AD 212, some 20,000 citizens were killed in this way, callously slaughtered in the streets, the baths and in their homes. In May AD 215, Caracalla travelled to Alexandria, in Egypt, as part of a grand tour of the Empire. His second great act of atrocity took place there. The delusional emperor suddenly ordered his soldiers to slaughter all of the young men of the city, whom he believed had been mocking him; thousands of unarmed victims were rounded up and then summarily put to the sword in a great frenzy of emasculation, mutilation and rabid torture.

Caracalla was finally assassinated at the empire's eastern extreme edge in AD 217, while making a journey on the road between Edessa and Carrhae, in present-day Turkey. A murderous gang of conspirators, led by one of Caracalla's guards, an eight-foot-tall coal-black Mauretanian, Macrinus, decided that he needed to be dispatched into terminal oblivion for his own good. On the journey, Caracalla had a severe bout of food poisoning, and abruptly halted the march, left his imperial carriage and scurried to the roadside. As he crouched in the sand, straining, his face contorted in anguish, the gang of assassins approached him from behind (fortunately for them, the sound of their feet was muffled by deafening blasts of imperial flatulence) and together plunged their swords into the tyrant's back, and through his heart. Caracalla's mashed heart was expelled at speed through his chest-wall in arterial gouts of blood, at the same moment that a malevolent high-velocity fountain of imperial diarrhoea jetted from his raw, distended anus, coating his assassins and dissipating their triumph, since they immediately had to run to a nearby river to wash off the noxious excremental spatter. A final blast of posthumous flatulence tolled the end of Caracalla's reign and the beginning of the Empire's final acceleration into rapid-fire atrocity and calamitous collapse.

Macrinus only ruled for a year of undistinguished mayhem before he himself was purged and sliced into pieces, his fourteen-inch penis severed and fed to rabbits, in yet another of Rome's tumultuous

upheavals, to be succeeded, almost at random, by the fifteen-year-old Elagabalus (whose name is sometimes rendered as 'Heliogabalus'), a transsexual temple prostitute of the sun-god who bore the same name and whose wily family had positioned him for the imperial succession in order to rake in as much gold as possible. Among the final centuries of Roman emperors, only Elagabalus possessed the imaginative will, madness, and sheer drive for anarchistic carnage and sexual transmutation that had marked Rome's earlier zenith.

Elagabalus' reign of four years, from AD 218 to AD 222, also resonates into the contemporary atrocities of Europe and beyond. He relentlessly sodomised the entirety of his guard corps and anyone or anything else who came in range, including horses and other animals, and instituted the worship of the sun-god as the official religion of the entire empire, embodied by a black conical meteorite. But Elagabalus' potential to become the greatest exponent of imperial carnage and sexual experimentation was curtailed brutally, just as it was developing. His all-engulfing regime of imperial sodomy so enraged his over-abused guards that they chased him out of his palace, decapitated him (along with his entire family) and nonchalantly threw his body into the Tiber.

NOTE

[1] Above all, the sexual excess of Elagabalus' regime – with its emphasis on rampant and undifferentiated sodomy – forms an enduring exemplar for contemporary art and activist movements. In 1933, the French Surrealist Antonin Artaud presciently recast Elagabalus's life in his book *The Crowned Anarchist*, writing: 'I have written this Life of Heliogabalus as I would have spoken it and as I speak it. I have also written it to help those who read it to un-learn history a little - but, all the same, to find the essential thread.' The French writer Jean Genet wrote a play about Elagabalus's life in the early 1940s, during the Nazi Occupation of France, but burned it. The Japanese choreographer Tatsumi Hijikata drew on Elagabalus's sexual excesses for his final choreographic work, performed during an unprecedented era of sexual experimentation and violent street-riots in Tokyo, in which he danced with a sun-god phallus, *The Revolt Of The Body* (1968). And Elagabalus's life and work also inspired the German artist Anselm Kiefer in his art work *Antonin Artaud Heliogabalus* (2010).

POSTSCRIPT

“ULTIMA VERBA”: THE FINAL ATROCITY

The slaughter of Heliogabalus's successor, the puny mummy's boy Alexander Severus, by his own troops in AD 235 signalled a precipitous plunge into chaos and near-anarchy. For its final three centuries, the decaying Roman Empire reeled in a grotesque delirium of maledictions, imperial butchery and terminal humiliation.

Occasionally, a brutal military strongman would seize the role of emperor and manage to cling onto it for a few years before being bloodily deposed; but mostly, the emperors were slaughtered in rapid succession, propelling the Empire into a frenzied rhythm of carnage, towards its ultimate decimation. In one year alone, AD 238, six different emperors successively held power, with five being swiftly massacred: the majestic Empire transformed itself into one great, steaming bloodbath. The plebeian scum in the urban centres came under the sway of magicians and prophets of apocalyptic doom, who travelled from Judea, Egypt and other sources of ferment, foretelling the disintegration of the Empire and casting virulent curses upon its ruler. In their prophecies, the Roman emperor stands at the centre of a seething chaos, demanding divine adulation as he ceaselessly mutates between the shape of a lethal serpent and that of the Antichrist; then, warrior kings arise from beyond the reaches of the Empire, and shatter its power, unleashing rivers of blood, fire, plague and, ultimately, instituting the total fall of darkness upon the Empire.

The prophecies captivated the attention of the urban plebeian scum, who now sadly lacked any viscerally satisfying entertainment.

Rome's last great arena spectacle took place in AD 244, in an atmosphere of undirected, haywire brutality. All of the beasts in the arena's zoo were unceremoniously herded into the killing zone and butchered wholesale; the gladiators compulsively massacred one another to the last man, while the spectators wept. The final gladiator then faced the crowd and sliced his own throat. After that, the abandoned arena fell into total dereliction.

The imperial frontiers became increasingly assailed, ready to burst open on all sides as the Teutonic hordes and the Asian despots prepared to finally obliterate the Roman Empire; the dispirited, faction-ridden legions at the borders grew increasingly mutinous as they tried to stem the inevitable flood. Finally, in AD 408, the rampaging Teutons – held back for centuries – unleashed a massive assault and poured through the frontier; the Visigoth tribe and then the Vandals subjugated the Empire's capital. Rome would be invaded, destroyed and pounded into oblivion on innumerable occasions over

the following century. The brutalized and terrorized plebeian scum were sent fleeing for their lives in every direction, and Rome lost large swathes of its population. In AD 476, the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was nonchalantly deposed by a pack of mercenaries. The ruined, dirt-encrusted city subsided into decomposition, still echoing in its emptiness with the glorious acts of Caligula and Commodus.

The most abject humiliation in the disintegrating history of the Empire came when the emperor Valerian's army was ambushed and destroyed in AD 260 by the great Persian despot, King Shapur I; the emperor himself was put into chains and taken into captivity to the city of Ctesiphon, on the banks of the river Tigris, where Shapur had his palace. With the emperor at his mercy, Shapur decided that some appropriate degradation was now in order. He began to use Valerian as a human footstool, and when mounting his horse, he would compel the emperor to go down on his hands and knees, so that Shapur could stand on his back while climbing onto the horse.

Shapur had decreed that while Valerian was in that position, every citizen of his kingdom, down to the lowliest freaks, morons and beggars, had the inalienable right to bugger the Roman emperor to their heart's content. It has been suggested that dogs, too, possessed this right and exercised it on occasion, but, given the Persian despot's notoriously strict views on abnormal sexual acts, this may be an exaggeration. When, after many years of captivity, the decrepit emperor – who had grown fully accustomed to his role, and even preferred it to his former duties – finally died of old age, Shapur ordered that the entire skin be carefully removed from Valerian's body, all in one piece, before being decorated with abstract patterns in coloured inks. He then hung the emperor's skin on the wall of his palace, as an attractive interior decoration.

The Roman Empire was now plummeting in insane freefall, heading rapidly towards its bitter end. In Rome itself, the disabused citizens experienced no nostalgia whatsoever for the rule of the most inept, butchery-crazed series of tyrants that the western world has ever seen. The Dark Ages were approaching fast, but for a moment at least, the inhabitants of Rome could breathe a sigh of relief and tell one another that now, it was time for *la dolce vita*.

NOTES ON SOURCES

This account is drawn from contemporary sources, biographies, manuals, polemics and newly-excavated documents (notably the "Butrinte Caligula"), as well as from works of the following centuries, from the golden era of Roman scholarship in Germany in the

1900s-1910s, and – least usefully by a wide margin – from recent biographies of Caligula and Commodus. All material of every kind written on the Roman era, whatever its date of composition, reflects the strictures and gaps and limitations of its time, and it would require the most omniscient oracle to say definitively what was authentic.

—Stephen Barber

THE LIFE OF NERO

BY SUETONIUS

I. Two celebrated families, the Calvini and Aenobarbi, sprung from the race of the Domitii. The Aenobarbi derive both their extraction and their cognomen from one Lucius Domitius, of whom we have this tradition: As he was returning out of the country to Rome, he was met by two young men of a most august appearance, who desired him to announce to the senate and people a victory, of which no certain intelligence had yet reached the city. To prove that they were more than mortals, they stroked his cheeks, and thus changed his hair, which was black, to a bright colour, resembling that of brass; which mark of distinction descended to his posterity, for they had generally red beards. This family had the honour of seven consulships, one triumph, and two censorships; and being admitted into the patrician order, they continued the use of the same cognomen, with no other prænomena than those of Cneius and Lucius. These, however, they assumed with singular irregularity; three persons in succession sometimes adhering to one of them, and then they were changed alternately. For the first, second, and third of the Aenobarbi had the prænomen of Lucius, and again the three following, successively, that of Cneius, while those who came after were called, by turns, one, Lucius, and the other, Cneius. It appears to me proper to give a short account of several of the family, to show that Nero so far degenerated from the noble qualities of his ancestors, that he retained only their vices; as if those alone had been transmitted to him by his descent.

II. To begin, therefore, at a remote period, his great-grandfather's grandfather, Cneius Domitius, when he was tribune of the people, being offended with the high priests for electing another than himself in the room of his father, obtained the transfer of the right of election from the colleges of the priests to the people. In his consulship, having conquered the Allobroges and the Arverni, he made a progress through the province, mounted upon an elephant, with a body of soldiers attending him, in a sort of triumphal pomp. Of this person the orator Licinius Crassus said, "It was no wonder he had a brazen beard, who had a face of iron, and a heart of lead." His son, during his praetorship, proposed that Cneius Caesar, upon the expiration of his consulship, should be called to account before the senate for his administration of that office, which was supposed to be contrary both to the omens and the laws. Afterwards, when he was consul himself,

he tried to deprive Cneius of the command of the army, and having been, by intrigue and cabal, appointed his successor, he was made prisoner at Corsinium, in the beginning of the civil war. Being set at liberty, he went to Marseilles, which was then besieged; where having, by his presence, animated the people to hold out, he suddenly deserted them, and at last was slain in the battle of Pharsalia. He was a man of little constancy, and of a sullen temper. In despair of his fortunes, he had recourse to poison, but was so terrified at the thoughts of death, that, immediately repenting, he took a vomit to throw it up again, and gave freedom to his physician for having, with great prudence and wisdom, given him only a gentle dose of the poison. When Cneius Pompey was consulting with his friends in what manner he should conduct himself towards those who were neuter and took no part in the contest, he was the only one who proposed that they should be treated as enemies.

III. He left a son, who was, without doubt, the best of the family. By the Pedian law, he was condemned, although innocent, amongst others who were concerned in the death of Caesar. Upon this, he went over to Brutus and Cassius, his near relations; and, after their death, not only kept together the fleet, the command of which had been given him some time before, but even increased it. At last, when the party had everywhere been defeated, he voluntarily surrendered it to Mark Antony; considering it as a piece of service for which the latter owed him no small obligations. Of all those who were condemned by the law above-mentioned, he was the only man who was restored to his country, and filled the highest offices. When the civil war again broke out, he was appointed lieutenant under the same Antony, and offered the chief command by those who were ashamed of Cleopatra; but not daring, on account of a sudden indisposition with which he was seized, either to accept or refuse it, he went over to Augustus, and died a few days after, not without an aspersion cast upon his memory. For Antony gave out, that he was induced to change sides by his impatience to be with his mistress, Servilia Nais.

IV. This Cneius had a son, named Domitius, who was afterwards well known as the nominal purchaser of the family property left by Augustus's will; and no less famous in his youth for his dexterity in chariot-driving, than he was afterwards for the triumphal ornaments which he obtained in the German war. But he was a man of great arrogance, prodigality, and cruelty. When he was aedile, he obliged Lucius Plancus, the censor, to give him the way; and in his praetorship, and consulship, he made Roman knights and married women act on the stage. He gave hunts of wild beasts, both in the

Circus and in all the wards of the city; as also a show of gladiators; but with such barbarity, that Augustus, after privately reprimanding him, to no purpose, was obliged to restrain him by a public edict.

V. By the elder Antonia he had Nero's father, a man of execrable character in every part of his life. During his attendance upon Caius Caesar in the East, he killed a freedman of his own, for refusing to drink as much as he ordered him. Being dismissed for this from Caesar's society, he did not mend his habits; for, in a village upon the Appian road, he suddenly whipped his horses, and drove his chariot, on purpose, over a poor boy, crushing him to pieces. At Rome, he struck out the eye of a Roman knight in the Forum, only for some free language in a dispute between them. He was likewise so fraudulent, that he not only cheated some silversmiths of the price of goods he had bought of them, but, during his praetorship, defrauded the owners of chariots in the Circensian games of the prizes due to them for their victory. His sister, jeering him for the complaints made by the leaders of the several parties, he agreed to sanction a law, "That, for the future, the prizes should be immediately paid." A little before the death of Tiberius, he was prosecuted for treason, adulteries, and incest with his sister Lepida, but escaped in the timely change of affairs, and died of a dropsy, at Pyrgi; leaving behind him his son, Nero, whom he had by Agrippina, the daughter of Germanicus.

VI. Nero was born at Antium, nine months after the death of Tiberius, upon the eighteenth of the calends of January [15th December], just as the sun rose, so that its beams touched him before they could well reach the earth. While many fearful conjectures, in respect to his future fortune, were formed by different persons, from the circumstances of his nativity, a saying of his father, Domitius, was regarded as an ill presage, who told his friends who were congratulating him upon the occasion, "That nothing but what was detestable, and pernicious to the public, could ever be produced of him and Agrippina." Another manifest prognostic of his future infelicity occurred upon his lustration day. For Caius Caesar being requested by his sister to give the child what name he thought proper – looking at his uncle, Claudius, who afterwards, when emperor, adopted Nero, he gave his: and this not seriously, but only in jest; Agrippina treating it with contempt, because Claudius at that time was a mere laughing-stock at the palace. He lost his father when he was three years old, being left heir to a third part of his estate; of which he never got possession, the whole being seized by his co-heir, Caius. His mother being soon after banished, he lived with his aunt Lepida, in a very necessitous condition, under the care of two tutors, a

dancing-master and a barber. After Claudius came to the empire, he not only recovered his father's estate, but was enriched with the additional inheritance of that of his step-father, Crispus Passienus. Upon his mother's recall from banishment, he was advanced to such favour, through Nero's powerful interest with the emperor, that it was reported, assassins were employed by Messalina, Claudius's wife, to strangle him, as Britannicus's rival, whilst he was taking his noon-day repose. In addition to the story, it was said that they were frightened by a serpent, which crept from under his cushion, and ran away. The tale was occasioned by finding on his couch, near the pillow, the skin of a snake, which, by his mother's order, he wore for some time upon his right arm, inclosed in a bracelet of gold. This amulet, at last, he laid aside, from aversion to her memory; but he sought for it again, in vain, in the time of his extremity.

VII. When he was yet a mere boy, before he arrived at the age of puberty, during the celebration of the Circensian games, he performed his part in the Trojan play with a degree of firmness which gained him great applause. In the eleventh year of his age, he was adopted by Claudius, and placed under the tuition of Annaeus Seneca, who had been made a senator. It is said, that Seneca dreamt the night after, that he was giving a lesson to Caius Caesar. Nero soon verified his dream, betraying the cruelty of his disposition in every way he could. For he attempted to persuade his father that his brother, Britannicus, was nothing but a changeling, because the latter had saluted him, notwithstanding his adoption, by the name of Aenobarbus, as usual. When his aunt, Lepida, was brought to trial, he appeared in court as a witness against her, to gratify his mother, who persecuted the accused. On his introduction into the Forum, at the age of manhood, he gave a largess to the people and a donative to the soldiers: for the pretorian cohorts, he appointed a solemn procession under arms, and marched at the head of them with a shield in his hand; after which he went to return thanks to his father in the senate. Before Claudius, likewise, at the time he was consul, he made a speech for the Bolognese, in Latin, and for the Rhodians and people of Ilium, in Greek. He had the jurisdiction of praefect of the city, for the first time, during the Latin festival; during which the most celebrated advocates brought before him, not short and trifling causes, as is usual in that case, but trials of importance, notwithstanding they had instructions from Claudius himself to the contrary. Soon afterwards, he married Octavia, and exhibited the Circensian games, and hunting of wild beasts, in honour of Claudius.

VIII. He was seventeen years of age at the death of that prince, and as soon as that event was made public, he went out to the cohort on guard between the hours of six and seven; for the omens were so disastrous, that no earlier time of the day was judged proper. On the steps before the palace gate, he was unanimously saluted by the soldiers as their emperor, and then carried in a litter to the camp; thence, after making a short speech to the troops, into the senate-house, where he continued until the evening; of all the immense honours which were heaped upon him, refusing none but the title of Father of his country, on account of his youth.

IX. He began his reign with an ostentation of dutiful regard to the memory of Claudius, whom he buried with the utmost pomp and magnificence, pronouncing the funeral oration himself, and then had him enrolled amongst the gods. He paid likewise the highest honours to the memory of his father Domitius. He left the management of affairs, both public and private, to his mother. The word which he gave the first day of his reign to the tribune on guard, was, "The Best of Mothers," and afterwards he frequently appeared with her in the streets of Rome in her litter. He settled a colony at Antium, in which he placed the veteran soldiers belonging to the guards; and obliged several of the richest centurions of the first rank to transfer their residence to that place; where he likewise made a noble harbour at a prodigious expense.

X. To establish still further his character, he declared, "that he designed to govern according to the model of Augustus;" and omitted no opportunity of showing his generosity, clemency, and complaisance. The more burthensome taxes he either entirely took off, or diminished. The rewards appointed for informers by the Papian law, he reduced to a fourth part, and distributed to the people four hundred sesterces a man. To the noblest of the senators who were much reduced in their circumstances, he granted annual allowances, in some cases as much as five hundred thousand sesterces; and to the pretorian cohorts a monthly allowance of corn gratis. When called upon to subscribe the sentence, according to custom, of a criminal condemned to die, "I wish," said he, "I had never learnt to read and write." He continually saluted people of the several orders by name, without a prompter. When the senate returned him their thanks for his good government, he replied to them, "It will be time enough to do so when I shall have deserved it." He admitted the common people to see him perform his exercises in the Campus Martius. He frequently declaimed in public, and recited verses of his own composing, not only at home, but in the theatre; so much to the joy of all the people,

that public prayers were appointed to be put up to the gods upon that account; and the verses which had been publicly read, were, after being written in gold letters, consecrated to Jupiter Capitolinus.

XI. He presented the people with a great number and variety of spectacles, as the Juvenal and Circensian games, stage-plays, and an exhibition of gladiators. In the Juvenal, he even admitted senators and aged matrons to perform parts. In the Circensian games, he assigned the equestrian order seats apart from the rest of the people, and had races performed by chariots drawn each by four camels. In the games which he instituted for the eternal duration of the empire, and therefore ordered to be called Maximi, many of the senatorian and equestrian order, of both sexes, performed. A distinguished Roman knight descended on the stage by a rope, mounted on an elephant. A Roman play, likewise, composed by Afranius, was brought upon the stage. It was entitled, "The Fire;" and in it the performers were allowed to carry off, and to keep to themselves, the furniture of the house, which, as the plot of the play required, was burnt down in the theatre. Every day during the solemnity, many thousand articles of all descriptions were thrown amongst the people to scramble for; such as fowls of different kinds, tickets for corn, clothes, gold, silver, gems, pearls, pictures, slaves, beasts of burden, wild beasts that had been tamed; at last, ships, lots of houses, and lands, were offered as prizes in a lottery.

XII. These games he beheld from the front of the proscenium. In the show of gladiators, which he exhibited in a wooden amphitheatre, built within a year in the district of the Campus Martius, he ordered that none should be slain, not even the condemned criminals employed in the combats. He secured four hundred senators, and six hundred Roman knights, amongst whom were some of unbroken fortunes and unblemished reputation, to act as gladiators. From the same orders, he engaged persons to encounter wild beasts, and for various other services in the theatre. He presented the public with the representation of a naval fight, upon sea-water, with huge fishes swimming in it; as also with the Pyrrhic dance, performed by certain youths, to each of whom, after the performance was over, he granted the freedom of Rome. During this diversion, a bull covered Pasiphae, concealed within a wooden statue of a cow, as many of the spectators believed. Icarus, upon his first attempt to fly, fell on the stage close to the emperor's pavilion, and bespattered him with blood. For he very seldom presided in the games, but used to view them reclining on a couch, at first through some narrow apertures, but afterwards with the Podium quite open. He was the first who instituted, in imitation of the

Greeks, a trial of skill in the three several exercises of music, wrestling, and horse-racing, to be performed at Rome every five years, and which he called Neronia. Upon the dedication of his bath and gymnasium, he furnished the senate and the equestrian order with oil. He appointed as judges of the trial men of consular rank, chosen by lot, who sat with the praetors. At this time he went down into the orchestra amongst the senators, and received the crown for the best performance in Latin prose and verse, for which several persons of the greatest merit contended, but they unanimously yielded to him. The crown for the best performer on the harp, being likewise awarded to him by the judges, he devoutly saluted it, and ordered it to be carried to the statue of Augustus. In the gymnastic exercises, which he presented in the Septa, while they were preparing the great sacrifice of an ox, he shaved his beard for the first time, and putting it up in a casket of gold studded with pearls of great price, consecrated it to Jupiter Capitolinus. He invited the Vestal Virgins to see the wrestlers perform, because, at Olympia, the priestesses of Ceres are allowed the privilege of witnessing that exhibition.

XIII. Amongst the spectacles presented by him, the solemn entrance of Tiridates into the city deserves to be mentioned. This personage, who was king of Armenia, he invited to Rome by very liberal promises. But being prevented by unfavourable weather from showing him to the people upon the day fixed by proclamation, he took the first opportunity which occurred; several cohorts being drawn up under arms, about the temples in the forum, while he was seated on a curule chair on the rostra, in a triumphal dress, amidst the military standards and ensigns. Upon Tiridates advancing towards him, on a stage made shelving for the purpose, he permitted him to throw himself at his feet, but quickly raised him with his right hand, and kissed him. The emperor then, at the king's request, took the turban from his head, and replaced it by a crown, whilst a person of pretorian rank proclaimed in Latin the words in which the prince addressed the emperor as a suppliant. After this ceremony, the king was conducted to the theatre, where, after renewing his obeisance, Nero seated him on his right hand. Being then greeted by universal acclamation with the title of Emperor, and sending his laurel crown to the Capitol, Nero shut the temple of the two-faced Janus, as though there now existed no war throughout the Roman empire.

XIV. He filled the consulship four times: the first for two months, the second and last for six, and the third for four; the two intermediate ones he held successively, but the others after an interval of some years between them.

XV. In the administration of justice, he scarcely ever gave his decision on the pleadings before the next day, and then in writing. His manner of hearing causes was not to allow any adjournment, but to dispatch them in order as they stood. When he withdrew to consult his assessors, he did not debate the matter openly with them; but silently and privately reading over their opinions, which they gave separately in writing, he pronounced sentence from the tribunal according to his own view of the case, as if it was the opinion of the majority. For a long time he would not admit the sons of freedmen into the senate; and those who had been admitted by former princes, he excluded from all public offices. To supernumerary candidates he gave command in the legions, to comfort them under the delay of their hopes. The consulship he commonly conferred for six months; and one of the two consuls dying a little before the first of January, he substituted no one in his place; disliking what had been formerly done for Caninius Rebilus on such an occasion, who was consul for one day only. He allowed the triumphal honours only to those who were of quaestorian rank, and to some of the equestrian order; and bestowed them without regard to military service. And instead of the quaestors, whose office it properly was, he frequently ordered that the addresses, which he sent to the senate on certain occasions, should be read by the consuls.

XVI. He devised a new style of building in the city, ordering piazzas to be erected before all houses, both in the streets and detached, to give facilities from their terraces, in case of fire, for preventing it from spreading; and these he built at his own expense. He likewise designed to extend the city walls as far as Ostia, and bring the sea from thence by a canal into the old city. Many severe regulations and new orders were made in his time. A sumptuary law was enacted. Public suppers were limited to the Sportulae; and victualling-houses restrained from selling any dressed victuals, except pulse and herbs, whereas before they sold all kinds of meat. He likewise inflicted punishments on the Christians, a sort of people who held a new and impious superstition. He forbid the revels of the charioteers, who had long assumed a licence to stroll about, and established for themselves a kind of prescriptive right to cheat and thieve, making a jest of it. The partisans of the rival theatrical performers were banished, as well as the actors themselves.

XVII. To prevent forgery, a method was then first invented, of having writings bored, run through three times with a thread, and then sealed. It was likewise provided that in wills, the two first pages, with

only the testator's name upon them, should be presented blank to those who were to sign them as witnesses; and that no one who wrote a will for another, should insert any legacy for himself. It was likewise ordained that clients should pay their advocates a certain reasonable fee, but nothing for the court, which was to be gratuitous, the charges for it being paid out of the public treasury; that causes, the cognizance of which before belonged to the judges of the exchequer, should be transferred to the forum, and the ordinary tribunals; and that all appeals from the judges should be made to the senate.

XVIII. He never entertained the least ambition or hope of augmenting and extending the frontiers of the empire. On the contrary, he had thoughts of withdrawing the troops from Britain, and was only restrained from so doing by the fear of appearing to detract from the glory of his father. All that he did was to reduce the kingdom of Pontus, which was ceded to him by Polemon, and also the Alps, upon the death of Cottius, into the form of a province.

XIX. Twice only he undertook any foreign expeditions, one to Alexandria, and the other to Achaia; but he abandoned the prosecution of the former on the very day fixed for his departure, by being deterred both by ill omens, and the hazard of the voyage. For while he was making the circuit of the temples, having seated himself in that of Vesta, when he attempted to rise, the skirt of his robe stuck fast; and he was instantly seized with such a dimness in his eyes, that he could not see a yard before him. In Achaia, he attempted to make a cut through the Isthmus; and, having made a speech encouraging his pretorians to set about the work, on a signal given by sound of trumpet, he first broke ground with a spade, and carried off a basket full of earth upon his shoulders. He made preparations for an expedition to the Pass of the Caspian mountains; forming a new legion out of his late levies in Italy, of men all six feet high, which he called the phalanx of Alexander the Great. These transactions, in part unexceptionable, and in part highly commendable, I have brought into one view, in order to separate them from the scandalous and criminal part of his conduct, of which I shall now give an account.

XX. Among the other liberal arts which he was taught in his youth, he was instructed in music; and immediately after his advancement to the empire, he sent for Terpnus, a performer upon the harp, who flourished at that time with the highest reputation. Sitting with him for several days following, as he sang and played after supper, until late at night, he began by degrees to practise upon the instrument himself. Nor did he omit any of those expedients which artists in

music adopt, for the preservation and improvement of their voices. He would lie upon his back with a sheet of lead upon his breast, clear his stomach and bowels by vomits and clysters, and forbear the eating of fruits, or food prejudicial to the voice. Encouraged by his proficiency, though his voice was naturally neither loud nor clear, he was desirous of appearing upon the stage, frequently repeating amongst his friends a Greek proverb to this effect: "that no one had any regard for music which they never heard." Accordingly, he made his first public appearance at Naples; and although the theatre quivered with the sudden shock of an earthquake, he did not desist, until he had finished the piece of music he had begun. He played and sung in the same place several times, and for several days together; taking only now and then a little respite to refresh his voice. Impatient of retirement, it was his custom to go from the bath to the theatre; and after dining in the orchestra, amidst a crowded assembly of the people, he promised them in Greek, "that after he had drank a little, he would give them a tune which would make their ears tingle." Being highly pleased with the songs that were sung in his praise by some Alexandrians belonging to the fleet just arrived at Naples, he sent for more of the like singers from Alexandria. At the same time, he chose young men of the equestrian order, and above five thousand robust young fellows from the common people, on purpose to learn various kinds of applause, called *bombi*, *imbrices*, and *testae*, which they were to practise in his favour, whenever he performed. They were divided into several parties, and were remarkable for their fine heads of hair, and were extremely well dressed, with rings upon their left hands. The leaders of these bands had salaries of forty thousand sesterces allowed them.

XXI. At Rome also, being extremely proud of his singing, he ordered the games called *Neronia* to be celebrated before the time fixed for their return. All now becoming importunate to hear "his heavenly voice," he informed them, "that he would gratify those who desired it at the gardens." But the soldiers then on guard seconding the voice of the people, he promised to comply with their request immediately, and with all his heart. He instantly ordered his name to be entered upon the list of musicians who proposed to contend, and having thrown his lot into the urn among the rest, took his turn, and entered, attended by the prefects of the pretorian cohorts bearing his harp, and followed by the military tribunes, and several of his intimate friends. After he had taken his station, and made the usual prelude, he commanded *Cluvius Rufus*, a man of consular rank, to proclaim in the theatre, that he intended to sing the story of *Niobe*. This he accordingly did, and continued it until nearly ten o'clock, but deferred the disposal of the crown, and the remaining part of the solemnity,

until the next year; that he might have more frequent opportunities of performing. But that being too long, he could not refrain from often appearing as a public performer during the interval. He made no scruple of exhibiting on the stage, even in the spectacles presented to the people by private persons, and was offered by one of the praetors, no less than a million of sesterces for his services. He likewise sang tragedies in a mask; the visors of the heroes and gods, as also of the heroines and goddesses, being formed into a resemblance of his own face, and that of any woman he was in love with. Amongst the rest, he sung "Canace in Labour," "Orestes the Murderer of his Mother," "Oedipus Blinded," and "Hercules Mad." In the last tragedy, it is said that a young sentinel, posted at the entrance of the stage, seeing him in a prison dress and bound with fetters, as the fable of the play required, ran to his assistance.

XXII. He had from his childhood an extravagant passion for horses; and his constant talk was of the Circensian races, notwithstanding it was prohibited him. Lamenting once, among his fellow-pupils, the case of a charioteer of the green party, who was dragged round the circus at the tail of his chariot, and being reprimanded by his tutor for it, he pretended that he was talking of Hector. In the beginning of his reign, he used to amuse himself daily with chariots drawn by four horses, made of ivory, upon a table. He attended at all the lesser exhibitions in the circus, at first privately, but at last openly; so that nobody ever doubted of his presence on any particular day. Nor did he conceal his desire to have the number of the prizes doubled; so that the races being increased accordingly, the diversion continued until a late hour; the leaders of parties refusing now to bring out their companies for any time less than the whole day. Upon this, he took a fancy for driving the chariot himself, and that even publicly. Having made his first experiment in the gardens, amidst crowds of slaves and other rabble, he at length performed in the view of all the people, in the Circus Maximus, whilst one of his freedmen dropped the napkin in the place where the magistrates used to give the signal. Not satisfied with exhibiting various specimens of his skill in those arts at Rome, he went over to Achaia, as has been already said, principally for this purpose. The several cities, in which solemn trials of musical skill used to be publicly held, had resolved to send him the crowns belonging to those who bore away the prize. These he accepted so graciously, that he not only gave the deputies who brought them an immediate audience, but even invited them to his table. Being requested by some of them to sing at supper, and prodigiously applauded, he said, "the Greeks were the only people who has an ear for music, and were the only good judges of him and his attainments." Without delay he

commenced his journey, and on his arrival at Cassiope, exhibited his first musical performance before the altar of Jupiter Cassius.

XXIII. He afterwards appeared at the celebration of all public games in Greece: for such as fell in different years, he brought within the compass of one, and some he ordered to be celebrated a second time in the same year. At Olympia, likewise, contrary to custom, he appointed a public performance in music: and that he might meet with no interruption in this employment, when he was informed by his freedman Helius, that affairs at Rome required his presence, he wrote to him in these words: "Though now all your hopes and wishes are for my speedy return, yet you ought rather to advise and hope that I may come back with a character worthy of Nero." During the time of his musical performance, nobody was allowed to stir out of the theatre upon any account, however necessary; insomuch, that it is said some women with child were delivered there. Many of the spectators being quite wearied with hearing and applauding him, because the town gates were shut, slipped privately over the walls; or counterfeiting themselves dead, were carried out for their funeral. With what extreme anxiety he engaged in these contests, with what keen desire to bear away the prize, and with how much awe of the judges, is scarcely to be believed. As if his adversaries had been on a level with himself, he would watch them narrowly, defame them privately, and sometimes, upon meeting them, rail at them in very scurrilous language; or bribe them, if they were better performers than himself. He always addressed the judges with the most profound reverence before he began, telling them, "he had done all things that were necessary, by way of preparation, but that the issue of the approaching trial was in the hand of fortune; and that they, as wise and skilful men, ought to exclude from their judgment things merely accidental." Upon their encouraging him to have a good heart, he went off with more assurance, but not entirely free from anxiety; interpreting the silence and modesty of some of them into sourness and ill-nature, and saying that he was suspicious of them.

XXIV. In these contests, he adhered so strictly to the rules, that he never durst spit, nor wipe the sweat from his forehead in any other way than with his sleeve. Having, in the performance of a tragedy, dropped his sceptre, and not quickly recovering it, he was in a great fright, lest he should be set aside for the miscarriage, and could not regain his assurance, until an actor who stood by swore he was certain it had not been observed in the midst of the acclamations and exultations of the people. When the prize was adjudged to him, he always proclaimed it himself; and even entered the lists with the

heralds. That no memory or the least monument might remain of any other victor in the sacred Grecian games, he ordered all their statues and pictures to be pulled down, dragged away with hooks, and thrown into the common sewers. He drove the chariot with various numbers of horses, and at the Olympic games with no fewer than ten; though, in a poem of his, he had reflected upon Mithridates for that innovation. Being thrown out of his chariot, he was again replaced, but could not retain his seat, and was obliged to give up, before he reached the goal, but was crowned notwithstanding. On his departure, he declared the whole province a free country, and conferred upon the judges in the several games the freedom of Rome, with large sums of money. All these favours he proclaimed himself with his own voice, from the middle of the Stadium, during the solemnity of the Isthmian games.

XXV. On his return from Greece, arriving at Naples, because he had commenced his career as a public performer in that city, he made his entrance in a chariot drawn by white horses through a breach in the city-wall, according to the practice of those who were victorious in the sacred Grecian games. In the same manner he entered Antium, Alba, and Rome. He made his entry into the city riding in the same chariot in which Augustus had triumphed, in a purple tunic, and a cloak embroidered with golden stars, having on his head the crown won at Olympia, and in his right hand that which was given him at the Parthian games: the rest being carried in a procession before him, with inscriptions denoting the places where they had been won, from whom, and in what plays or musical performances; whilst a train followed him with loud acclamations, crying out, that “they were the emperor’s attendants, and the soldiers of his triumph.” Having then caused an arch of the Circus Maximus to be taken down, he passed through the breach, as also through the Velabrum and the forum, to the Palatine hill and the temple of Apollo. Everywhere as he marched along, victims were slain, whilst the streets were strewn with saffron, and birds, chaplets, and sweetmeats scattered abroad. He suspended the sacred crowns in his chamber, about his beds, and caused statues of himself to be erected in the attire of a harper, and had his likeness stamped upon the coin in the same dress. After this period, he was so far from abating any thing of his application to music, that, for the preservation of his voice, he never addressed the soldiers but by messages, or with some person to deliver his speeches for him, when he thought fit to make his appearance amongst them. Nor did he ever do any thing either in jest or earnest, without a voice-master standing by him to caution him against overstraining his vocal organs, and to apply a handkerchief to his mouth when he did. He offered his

friendship, or avowed open enmity to many, according as they were lavish or sparing in giving him their applause.

XXVI. Petulancy, lewdness, luxury, avarice, and cruelty, he practised at first with reserve and in private, as if prompted to them only by the folly of youth; but, even then, the world was of opinion that they were the faults of his nature, and not of his age. After it was dark, he used to enter the taverns disguised in a cap or a wig, and ramble about the streets in sport, which was not void of mischief. He used to beat those he met coming home from supper; and, if they made any resistance, would wound them, and throw them into the common sewer. He broke open and robbed shops; establishing an auction at home for selling his booty. In the scuffles which took place on those occasions, he often ran the hazard of losing his eyes, and even his life; being beaten almost to death by a senator, for handling his wife indecently. After this adventure, he never again ventured abroad at that time of night, without some tribunes following him at a little distance. In the day-time he would be carried to the theatre incognito in a litter, placing himself upon the upper part of the proscenium, where he not only witnessed the quarrels which arose on account of the performances, but also encouraged them. When they came to blows, and stones and pieces of broken benches began to fly about, he threw them plentifully amongst the people, and once even broke a praetor's head.

XXVII. His vices gaining strength by degrees, he laid aside his jocular amusements, and all disguise; breaking out into enormous crimes, without the least attempt to conceal them. His revels were prolonged from mid-day to midnight, while he was frequently refreshed by warm baths, and, in the summer time, by such as were cooled with snow. He often supped in public, in the Naumachia, with the sluices shut, or in the Campus Martius, or the Circus Maximus, being waited upon at table by common prostitutes of the town, and Syrian strumpets and glee-girls. As often as he went down the Tiber to Ostia, or coasted through the gulf of Baiae, booths furnished as brothels and eating-houses, were erected along the shore and river banks; before which stood matrons, who, like bawds and hostesses, allured him to land. It was also his custom to invite himself to supper with his friends; at one of which was expended no less than four millions of sesterces in chaplets, and at another something more in roses.

XXVIII. Besides the abuse of free-born lads, and the debauch of married women, he committed a rape upon Rubria, a Vestal Virgin. He was upon the point of marrying Acte, his freedwoman, having

suborned some men of consular rank to swear that she was of royal descent. He gelded the boy Sporus, and endeavoured to transform him into a woman. He even went so far as to marry him, with all the usual formalities of a marriage settlement, the rose-coloured nuptial veil, and a numerous company at the wedding. When the ceremony was over, he had him conducted like a bride to his own house, and treated him as his wife. It was jocularly observed by some person, "that it would have been well for mankind, had such a wife fallen to the lot of his father Domitius." This Sporus he carried about with him in a litter round the solemn assemblies and fairs of Greece, and afterwards at Rome through the Sigillaria, dressed in the rich attire of an empress; kissing him from time to time as they rode together. That he entertained an incestuous passion for his mother, but was deterred by her enemies, for fear that this haughty and overbearing woman should, by her compliance, get him entirely into her power, and govern in every thing, was universally believed; especially after he had introduced amongst his concubines a strumpet, who was reported to have a strong resemblance to Agrippina.

XXIX. He prostituted his own chastity to such a degree, that after he had defiled every part of his person with some unnatural pollution, he at last invented an extraordinary kind of diversion; which was, to be let out of a den in the arena, covered with the skin of a wild beast, and then assail with violence the private parts both of men and women, while they were bound to stakes. After he had vented his furious passion upon them, he finished the play in the embraces of his freedman Doryphorus, to whom he was married in the same way that Sporus had been married to himself; imitating the cries and shrieks of young virgins, when they are ravished. I have been informed from numerous sources, that he firmly believed, no man in the world to be chaste, or any part of his person undefiled; but that most men concealed that vice, and were cunning enough to keep it secret. To those, therefore, who frankly owned their unnatural lewdness, he forgave all other crimes.

XXX. He thought there was no other use of riches and money than to squander them away profusely; regarding all those as sordid wretches who kept their expenses within due bounds; and extolling those as truly noble and generous souls, who lavished away and wasted all they possessed. He praised and admired his uncle Caius, upon no account more, than for squandering in a short time the vast treasure left him by Tiberius. Accordingly, he was himself extravagant and profuse, beyond all bounds. He spent upon Tiridates eight hundred thousand sesterces a day, a sum almost incredible; and at his

departure, presented him with upwards of a million. He likewise bestowed upon Menecrates the harper, and Spicillus a gladiator, the estates and houses of men who had received the honour of a triumph. He enriched the usurer Cercopithecus Panerotes with estates both in town and country; and gave him a funeral, in pomp and magnificence little inferior to that of princes. He never wore the same garment twice. He has been known to stake four hundred thousand sesterces on a throw of the dice. It was his custom to fish with a golden net, drawn by silken cords of purple and scarlet. It is said, that he never travelled with less than a thousand baggage-carts; the mules being all shod with silver, and the drivers dressed in scarlet jackets of the finest Canusian cloth, with a numerous train of footmen, and troops of Mazacans, with bracelets on their arms, and mounted upon horses in splendid trappings.

XXXI. In nothing was he more prodigal than in his buildings. He completed his palace by continuing it from the Palatine to the Esquiline hill, calling the building at first only "The Passage," but, after it was burnt down and rebuilt, "The Golden House." Of its dimensions and furniture, it may be sufficient to say thus much: the porch was so high that there stood in it a colossal statue of himself a hundred and twenty feet in height; and the space included in it was so ample, that it had triple porticos a mile in length, and a lake like a sea, surrounded with buildings which had the appearance of a city. Within its area were corn fields, vineyards, pastures, and woods, containing a vast number of animals of various kinds, both wild and tame. In other parts it was entirely over-laid with gold, and adorned with jewels and mother of pearl. The supper rooms were vaulted, and compartments of the ceilings, inlaid with ivory, were made to revolve, and scatter flowers; while they contained pipes which shed unguents upon the guests. The chief banqueting room was circular, and revolved perpetually, night and day, in imitation of the motion of the celestial bodies. The baths were supplied with water from the sea and the Albula. Upon the dedication of this magnificent house after it was finished, all he said in approval of it was, "that he had now a dwelling fit for a man." He commenced making a pond for the reception of all the hot streams from Baiae, which he designed to have continued from Misenum to the Avernian lake, in a conduit, enclosed in galleries; and also a canal from Avernum to Ostia, that ships might pass from one to the other, without a sea voyage. The length of the proposed canal was one hundred and sixty miles; and it was intended to be of breadth sufficient to permit ships with five banks of oars to pass each other. For the execution of these designs, he ordered all prisoners, in every part of the empire, to be brought to Italy; and that even those who

were convicted of the most heinous crimes, in lieu of any other sentence, should be condemned to work at them. He was encouraged to all this wild and enormous profusion, not only by the great revenue of the empire, but by the sudden hopes given him of an immense hidden treasure, which queen Dido, upon her flight from Tyre, had brought with her to Africa. This, a Roman knight pretended to assure him, upon good grounds, was still hid there in some deep caverns, and might with a little labour be recovered.

XXXII. But being disappointed in his expectations of this resource, and reduced to such difficulties, for want of money, that he was obliged to defer paying his troops, and the rewards due to the veterans; he resolved upon supplying his necessities by means of false accusations and plunder. In the first place, he ordered, that if any freedman, without sufficient reason, bore the name of the family to which he belonged; the half, instead of three fourths, of his estate should be brought into the exchequer at his decease: also that the estates of all such persons as had not in their wills been mindful of their prince, should be confiscated; and that the lawyers who had drawn or dictated such wills, should be liable to a fine. He ordained likewise, that all words and actions, upon which any informer could ground a prosecution, should be deemed treason. He demanded an equivalent for the crowns which the cities of Greece had at any time offered him in the solemn games. Having forbid any one to use the colours of amethyst and Tyrian purple, he privately sent a person to sell a few ounces of them upon the day of the Nundinae, and then shut up all the merchants' shops, on the pretext that his edict had been violated. It is said, that, as he was playing and singing in the theatre, observing a married lady dressed in the purple which he had prohibited, he pointed her out to his procurators; upon which she was immediately dragged out of her seat, and not only stripped of her clothes, but her property. He never nominated a person to any office without saying to him, "You know what I want; and let us take care that nobody has any thing he can call his own." At last he rifled many temples of the rich offerings with which they were stored, and melted down all the gold and silver statues, and amongst them those of the penates, which Galba afterwards restored.

XXXIII. He began the practice of parricide and murder with Claudius himself; for although he was not the contriver of his death, he was privy to the plot. Nor did he make any secret of it; but used afterwards to commend, in a Greek proverb, mushrooms as food fit for the gods, because Claudius had been poisoned with them. He traduced his memory both by word and deed in the grossest manner; one while

charging him with folly, another while with cruelty. For he used to say by way of jest, that he had ceased morari amongst men, pronouncing the first syllable long; and treated as null many of his decrees and ordinances, as made by a doting old blockhead. He enclosed the place where his body was burnt with only a low wall of rough masonry. He attempted to poison Britannicus, as much out of envy because he had a sweeter voice, as from apprehension of what might ensue from the respect which the people entertained for his father's memory. He employed for this purpose a woman named Locusta, who had been a witness against some persons guilty of like practices. But the poison she gave him, working more slowly than he expected, and only causing a purge, he sent for the woman, and beat her with his own hand, charging her with administering an antidote instead of poison; and upon her alleging in excuse, that she had given Britannicus but a gentle mixture in order to prevent suspicion, "Think you," said he, "that I am afraid of the Julian law;" and obliged her to prepare, in his own chamber and before his eyes, as quick and strong a dose as possible. This he tried upon a kid: but the animal lingering for five hours before it expired, he ordered her to go to work again; and when she had done, he gave the poison to a pig, which dying immediately, he commanded the potion to be brought into the eating-room and given to Britannicus, while he was at supper with him. The prince had no sooner tasted it than he sunk on the floor, Nero meanwhile, pretending to the guests, that it was only a fit of the falling sickness, to which, he said, he was subject. He buried him the following day, in a mean and hurried way, during violent storms of rain. He gave Locusta a pardon, and rewarded her with a great estate in land, placing some disciples with her, to be instructed in her trade.

XXXIV. His mother being used to make strict inquiry into what he said or did, and to reprimand him with the freedom of a parent, he was so much offended, that he endeavoured to expose her to public resentment, by frequently pretending a resolution to quit the government, and retire to Rhodes. Soon afterwards, he deprived her of all honour and power, took from her the guard of Roman and German soldiers, banished her from the palace and from his society, and persecuted her in every way he could contrive; employing persons to harass her when at Rome with law-suits, and to disturb her in her retirement from town with the most scurrilous and abusive language, following her about by land and sea. But being terrified with her menaces and violent spirit, he resolved upon her destruction, and thrice attempted it by poison. Finding, however, that she had previously secured herself by antidotes, he contrived machinery, by which the floor over her bed-chamber might be made to fall upon her

while she was asleep in the night. This design miscarrying likewise, through the little caution used by those who were in the secret, his next stratagem was to construct a ship which could be easily shivered, in hopes of destroying her either by drowning, or by the deck above her cabin crushing her in its fall. Accordingly, under colour of a pretended reconciliation, he wrote her an extremely affectionate letter, inviting her to Baiae, to celebrate with him the festival of Minerva. He had given private orders to the captains of the galleys which were to attend her, to shatter to pieces the ship in which she had come, by falling foul of it, but in such manner that it might appear to be done accidentally. He prolonged the entertainment, for the more convenient opportunity of executing the plot in the night; and at her return for Bauli, instead of the old ship which had conveyed her to Baiae, he offered that which he had contrived for her destruction. He attended her to the vessel in a very cheerful mood, and, at parting with her, kissed her breasts; after which he sat up very late in the night, waiting with great anxiety to learn the issue of his project. But receiving information that every thing had fallen out contrary to his wish, and that she had saved herself by swimming, not knowing what course to take, upon her freedman, Lucius Agerinus bringing word, with great joy, that she was safe and well, he privately dropped a poniard by him. He then commanded the freedman to be seized and put in chains, under pretence of his having been employed by his mother to assassinate him; at the same time ordering her to be put to death, and giving out, that, to avoid punishment for her intended crime, she had laid violent hands upon herself. Other circumstances, still more horrible, are related on good authority; as that he went to view her corpse, and handling her limbs, pointed out some blemishes, and commended other points; and that, growing thirsty during the survey, he called for drink. Yet he was never afterwards able to bear the stings of his own conscience for this atrocious act, although encouraged by the congratulatory addresses of the army, the senate, and people. He frequently affirmed that he was haunted by his mother's ghost, and persecuted with the whips and burning torches of the Furies. Nay, he attempted by magical rites to bring up her ghost from below, and soften her rage against him. When he was in Greece, he durst not attend the celebration of the Eleusinian mysteries, at the initiation of which, impious and wicked persons are warned by the voice of the herald from approaching the rites. Besides the murder of his mother, he had been guilty of that of his aunt; for, being obliged to keep her bed in consequence of a complaint in her bowels, he paid her a visit, and she, being then advanced in years, stroking his downy chin, in the tenderness of affection, said to him: "May I but live to see the day when this is shaved for the first time,

and I shall then die contented.” He turned, however, to those about him, made a jest of it, saying, that he would have his beard immediately taken off, and ordered the physicians to give her more violent purgatives. He seized upon her estate before she had expired; suppressing her will, that he might enjoy the whole himself.

XXXV. He had, besides Octavia, two other wives: Poppaea Sabina, whose father had borne the office of quaestor, and who had been married before to a Roman knight: and, after her, Statilia Messalina, great-grand-daughter of Taurus who was twice consul, and received the honour of a triumph. To obtain possession of her, he put to death her husband, Atticus Vestinus, who was then consul. He soon became disgusted with Octavia, and ceased from having any intercourse with her; and being censured by his friends for it, he replied, “She ought to be satisfied with having the rank and appendages of his wife.” Soon afterwards, he made several attempts, but in vain, to strangle her, and then divorced her for barrenness. But the people, disapproving of the divorce, and making severe comments upon it, he also banished her. At last he put her to death, upon a charge of adultery, so impudent and false, that, when all those who were put to the torture positively denied their knowledge of it, he suborned his pedagogue, Anicetus, to affirm, that he had secretly intrigued with and debauched her. He married Poppaea twelve days after the divorce of Octavia, and entertained a great affection for her; but, nevertheless, killed her with a kick which he gave her when she was big with child, and in bad health, only because she found fault with him for returning late from driving his chariot. He had by her a daughter, Claudia Augusta, who died an infant. There was no person at all connected with him who escaped his deadly and unjust cruelty. Under pretence of her being engaged in a plot against him, he put to death Antonia, Claudius’s daughter, who refused to marry him after the death of Poppaea. In the same way, he destroyed all who were allied to him either by blood or marriage; amongst whom was young Aulus Plautinus. He first compelled him to submit to his unnatural lust, and then ordered him to be executed, crying out, “Let my mother bestow her kisses on my successor thus defiled;” pretending that he had been his mother’s paramour, and by her encouraged to aspire to the empire. His stepson, Rufinus Crispinus, Poppaea’s son, though a minor, he ordered to be drowned in the sea, while he was fishing, by his own slaves, because he was reported to act frequently amongst his play-fellows the part of a general or an emperor. He banished Tuscus, his nurse’s son, for presuming, when he was procurator of Egypt, to wash in the baths which had been constructed in expectation of his own coming. Seneca, his preceptor, he forced to kill himself, though, upon his desiring

leave to retire, and offering to surrender his estate, he solemnly swore, "that there was no foundation for his suspicions, and that he would perish himself sooner than hurt him." Having promised Burrhus, the pretorian prefect, a remedy for a swelling in his throat, he sent him poison. Some old rich freedmen of Claudius, who had formerly not only promoted his adoption, but were also instrumental to his advancement to the empire, and had been his governors, he took off by poison given them in their meat or drink.

XXXVI. Nor did he proceed with less cruelty against those who were not of his family. A blazing star, which is vulgarly supposed to portend destruction to kings and princes, appeared above the horizon several nights successively. He felt great anxiety on account of this phenomenon, and being informed by one Babilus, an astrologer, that princes were used to expiate such omens by the sacrifice of illustrious persons, and so avert the danger foreboded to their own persons, by bringing it on the heads of their chief men, he resolved on the destruction of the principal nobility in Rome. He was the more encouraged to this, because he had some plausible pretence for carrying it into execution, from the discovery of two conspiracies against him; the former and more dangerous of which was that formed by Piso, and discovered at Rome; the other was that of Vinicius, at Beneventum. The conspirators were brought to their trials loaded with triple fetters. Some ingenuously confessed the charge; others avowed that they thought the design against his life an act of favour for which he was obliged to them, as it was impossible in any other way than by death to relieve a person rendered infamous by crimes of the greatest enormity. The children of those who had been condemned, were banished the city, and afterwards either poisoned or starved to death. It is asserted that some of them, with their tutors, and the slaves who carried their satchels, were all poisoned together at one dinner; and others not suffered to seek their daily bread.

XXXVII. From this period he butchered, without distinction or quarter, all whom his caprice suggested as objects for his cruelty; and upon the most frivolous pretences. To mention only a few: Salvidienus Orfitus was accused of letting out three taverns attached to his house in the Forum to some cities for the use of their deputies at Rome. The charge against Cassius Longinus, a lawyer who had lost his sight, was, that he kept amongst the busts of his ancestors that of Caius Cassius, who was concerned in the death of Julius Caesar. The only charge objected against Paetus Thrasea was, that he had a melancholy cast of features, and looked like a schoolmaster. He allowed but one hour to those whom he obliged to kill themselves; and, to prevent delay, he sent

them physicians “to cure them immediately, if they lingered beyond that time;” for so he called bleeding them to death. There was at that time an Egyptian of a most voracious appetite, who would digest raw flesh, or any thing else that was given him. It was credibly reported, that the emperor was extremely desirous of furnishing him with living men to tear and devour. Being elated with his great success in the perpetration of crimes, he declared, “that no prince before himself ever knew the extent of his power.” He threw out strong intimations that he would not even spare the senators who survived, but would entirely extirpate that order, and put the provinces and armies into the hands of the Roman knights and his own freedmen. It is certain that he never gave or vouchsafed to allow any one the customary kiss, either on entering or departing, or even returned a salute. And at the inauguration of a work, the cut through the Isthmus, he, with a loud voice, amidst the assembled multitude, uttered a prayer, that “the undertaking might prove fortunate for himself and the Roman people,” without taking the smallest notice of the senate.

XXXVIII. He spared, moreover, neither the people of Rome, nor the capital of his country. Somebody in conversation saying: *Emou thanontos gaia michthaeto pyri* (“When I am dead let fire devour the world”). “Nay,” said he, “let it be while I am living”. And he acted accordingly: for, pretending to be disgusted with the old buildings, and the narrow and winding streets, he set the city on fire so openly, that many of consular rank caught his own household servants on their property with tow, and torches in their hands, but durst not meddle with them. There being near his Golden House some granaries, the site of which he exceedingly coveted, they were battered as if with machines of war, and set on fire, the walls being built of stone. During six days and seven nights this terrible devastation continued, the people being obliged to fly to the tombs and monuments for lodging and shelter. Meanwhile, a vast number of stately buildings, the houses of generals celebrated in former times, and even then still decorated with the spoils of war, were laid in ashes; as well as the temples of the gods, which had been vowed and dedicated by the kings of Rome, and afterwards in the Punic and Gallic wars: in short, everything that was remarkable and worthy to be seen which time had spared. This fire he beheld from a tower in the house of Mecaenas, and “being greatly delighted,” as he said, “with the beautiful effects of the conflagration,” he sung a poem on the ruin of Troy, in the tragic dress he used on the stage. To turn this calamity to his own advantage by plunder and rapine, he promised to remove the bodies of those who had perished in the fire, and clear the rubbish at his own expense; suffering no one to meddle with the

remains of their property. But he not only received, but exacted contributions on account of the loss, until he had exhausted the means both of the provinces and private persons.

XXXIX. To these terrible and shameful calamities brought upon the people by their prince, were added some proceeding from misfortune. Such were a pestilence, by which, within the space of one autumn, there died no less than thirty thousand persons, as appeared from the registers in the temple of Libitina; a great disaster in Britain, where two of the principal towns belonging to the Romans were plundered; and a dreadful havoc made both amongst our troops and allies; a shameful discomfiture of the army of the East; where, in Armenia, the legions were obliged to pass under the yoke, and it was with great difficulty that Syria was retained. Amidst all these disasters, it was strange, and, indeed, particularly remarkable, that he bore nothing more patiently than the scurrilous language and railing abuse which was in every one's mouth; treating no class of persons with more gentleness, than those who assailed him with invective and lampoons. Many things of that kind were posted up about the city, or otherwise published, both in Greek and Latin. But he neither made any inquiry after the authors, nor when information was laid before the senate against some of them, would he allow a severe sentence to be passed. Isidorus, the Cynic philosopher, said to him aloud, as he was passing along the streets, "You sing the misfortunes of Nauplius well, but behave badly yourself." And Datus, a comic actor, when repeating these words in the piece, "Farewell, father! Farewell mother!" mimicked the gestures of persons drinking and swimming, significantly alluding to the deaths of Claudius and Agrippina: and on uttering the last clause, "you stand this moment on the brink of Orcus", he plainly intimated his application of it to the precarious position of the senate. Yet Nero only banished the player and philosopher from the city and Italy; either because he was insensible to shame, or from apprehension that if he discovered his vexation, still keener things might be said of him.

XL. The world, after tolerating such an emperor for little less than fourteen years, at length forsook him; the Gauls, headed by Julius Vindex, who at that time governed the province as pro-praetor, being the first to revolt. Nero had been formerly told by astrologers, that it would be his fortune to be at last deserted by all the world; and this occasioned that celebrated saying of his, "An artist can live in any country;" by which he meant to offer as an excuse for his practice of music, that it was not only his amusement as a prince, but might be his support when reduced to a private station. Yet some of the

astrologers promised him, in his forlorn state, the rule of the East, and some in express words the kingdom of Jerusalem. But the greater part of them flattered him with assurances of his being restored to his former fortune. And being most inclined to believe the latter prediction, upon losing Britain and Armenia, he imagined he had run through all the misfortunes which the fates had decreed him. But when, upon consulting the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, he was advised to beware of the seventy-third year, as if he were not to die till then, never thinking of Galba's age, he conceived such hopes, not only of living to advanced years, but of constant and singular good fortune, that having lost some things of great value by shipwreck, he scrupled not to say amongst his friends, that "the fishes would bring them back to him." At Naples he heard of the insurrection in Gaul, on the anniversary of the day on which he killed his mother, and bore it with so much unconcern, as to excite a suspicion that he was really glad of it, since he had now a fair opportunity of plundering those wealthy provinces by the right of war. Immediately going to the gymnasium, he witnessed the exercise of the wrestlers with the greatest delight. Being interrupted at supper with letters which brought yet worse news, he expressed no greater resentment, than only to threaten the rebels. For eight days together, he never attempted to answer any letters, nor give any orders, but buried the whole affair in profound silence.

XLI. Being roused at last by numerous proclamations of Vindex, treating him with reproaches and contempt, he in a letter to the senate exhorted them to avenge his wrongs and those of the republic; desiring them to excuse his not appearing in the senate-house, because he had got cold. But nothing so much galled him, as to find himself railed at as a pitiful harper, and, instead of Nero, styled Aenobarbus: which being his family name, since he was upbraided with it, he declared that he would resume it, and lay aside the name he had taken by adoption. Passing by the other accusations as wholly groundless, he earnestly refuted that of his want of skill in an art upon which he had bestowed so much pains, and in which he had arrived at such perfection; asking frequently those about him, "if they knew any one who was a more accomplished musician?" But being alarmed by messengers after messengers of ill news from Gaul, he returned in great consternation to Rome. On the road, his mind was somewhat relieved, by observing the frivolous omen of a Gaulish soldier defeated and dragged by the hair by a Roman knight, which was sculptured on a monument; so that he leaped for joy, and adored the heavens. Even then he made no appeal either to the senate or people, but calling together some of the leading men at his own house, he held a hasty

consultation upon the present state of affairs, and then, during the remainder of the day, carried them about with him to view some musical instruments, of a new invention, which were played by water exhibiting all the parts, and discoursing upon the principles and difficulties of the contrivance; which, he told them, he intended to produce in the theatre, if Vindex would give him leave.

XLII. Soon afterwards, he received intelligence that Galba and the Spaniards had declared against him; upon which, he fainted, and losing his reason, lay a long time speechless, apparently dead. As soon as recovered from this state stupefaction he tore his clothes, and beat his head, crying out, "It is all over with me!" His nurse endeavouring to comfort him, and telling him that the like things had happened to other princes before him, he replied, "I am beyond all example wretched, for I have lost an empire whilst I am still living." He, nevertheless, abated nothing of his luxury and inattention to business. Nay, on the arrival of good news from the provinces, he, at a sumptuous entertainment, sung with an air of merriment, some jovial verses upon the leaders of the revolt, which were made public; and accompanied them with suitable gestures. Being carried privately to the theatre, he sent word to an actor who was applauded by the spectators, "that he had it all his own way, now that he himself did not appear on the stage."

XLIII. At the first breaking out of these troubles, it is believed that he had formed many designs of a monstrous nature, although conformable enough to his natural disposition. These were to send new governors and commanders to the provinces and the armies, and employ assassins to butcher all the former governors and commanders, as men unanimously engaged in a conspiracy against him; to massacre the exiles in every quarter, and all the Gaulish population in Rome; the former lest they should join the insurrection; the latter as privy to the designs of their countrymen, and ready to support them; to abandon Gaul itself, to be wasted and plundered by his armies; to poison the whole senate at a feast; to fire the city, and then let loose the wild beasts upon the people, in order to impede their stopping the progress of the flames. But being deterred from the execution of these designs not so much by remorse of conscience, as by despair of being able to effect them, and judging an expedition into Gaul necessary, he removed the consuls from their office, before the time of its expiration was arrived; and in their room assumed the consulship himself without a colleague, as if the fates had decreed that Gaul should not be conquered, but by a consul. Upon assuming the fasces, after an entertainment at the palace, as he walked out of the

room leaning on the arms of some of his friends, he declared, that as soon as he arrived in the province, he would make his appearance amongst the troops, unarmed, and do nothing but weep: and that, after he had brought the mutineers to repentance, he would, the next day, in the public rejoicings, sing songs of triumph, which he must now, without loss of time, apply himself to compose.

XLIV. In preparing for this expedition, his first care was to provide carriages for his musical instruments and machinery to be used upon the stage; to have the hair of the concubines he carried with him dressed in the fashion of men; and to supply them with battle-axes, and Amazonian bucklers. He summoned the city-tribes to enlist; but no qualified persons appearing, he ordered all masters to send a certain number of slaves, the best they had, not excepting their stewards and secretaries. He commanded the several orders of the people to bring in a fixed proportion of their estates, as they stood in the censor's books; all tenants of houses and mansions to pay one year's rent forthwith into the exchequer; and, with unheard-of strictness, would receive only new coin of the purest silver and the finest gold; insomuch that most people refused to pay, crying out unanimously that he ought to squeeze the informers, and oblige them to surrender their gains.

XLV. The general odium in which he was held received an increase by the great scarcity of corn, and an occurrence connected with it. For, as it happened just at that time, there arrived from Alexandria a ship, which was said to be freighted with dust for the wrestlers belonging to the emperor. This so much inflamed the public rage, that he was treated with the utmost abuse and scurrility. Upon the top of one of his statues was placed the figure of a chariot with a Greek inscription, that "Now indeed he had a race to run; let him be gone." A little bag was tied about another, with a ticket containing these words; "What could I do?" – "Truly thou hast merited the sack." Some person likewise wrote on the pillars in the forum, "that he had even woke the cocks with his singing." And many, in the night-time, pretending to find fault with their servants, frequently called for a Vindex.

XLVI. He was also terrified with manifest warnings, both old and new, arising from dreams, auspices, and omens. He had never been used to dream before the murder of his mother. After that event, he fancied in his sleep that he was steering a ship, and that the rudder was forced from him: that he was dragged by his wife Octavia into a prodigiously dark place; and was at one time covered over with a vast swarm of winged ants, and at another, surrounded by the national images which

were set up near Pompey's theatre, and hindered from advancing farther; that a Spanish jennet he was fond of, had his hinder parts so changed, as to resemble those of an ape; and having his head only left unaltered, neighed very harmoniously. The doors of the mausoleum of Augustus flying open of themselves, there issued from it a voice, calling on him by name. The Lares being adorned with fresh garlands on the calends [the first] of January, fell down during the preparations for sacrificing to them. While he was taking the omens, Sporus presented him with a ring, the stone of which had carved upon it the Rape of Proserpine. When a great multitude of the several orders was assembled, to attend at the solemnity of making vows to the gods, it was a long time before the keys of the Capitol could be found. And when, in a speech of his to the senate against Vindex, these words were read, "that the miscreants should be punished and soon make the end they merited," they all cried out, "You will do it, Augustus." It was likewise remarked, that the last tragic piece which he sung, was Oedipus in Exile, and that he fell as he was repeating this verse: *Thanein m' anoge syngamos, maetaer, pataer*. (" Wife, mother, father, force me to my end.")

XLVII. Meanwhile, on the arrival of the news, that the rest of the armies had declared against him, he tore to pieces the letters which were delivered to him at dinner, overthrew the table, and dashed with violence against the ground two favourite cups, which he called Homer's, because some of that poet's verses were cut upon them. Then taking from Locusta a dose of poison, which he put up in a golden box, he went into the Servilian gardens, and thence dispatching a trusty freedman to Ostia, with orders to make ready a fleet, he endeavoured to prevail with some tribunes and centurions of the pretorian guards to attend him in his flight; but part of them showing no great inclination to comply, others absolutely refusing, and one of them crying out aloud, *Usque adeone mori miserum est?* ("Say, is it then so sad a thing to die? "), he was in great perplexity whether he should submit himself to Galba, or apply to the Parthians for protection, or else appear before the people dressed in mourning, and, upon the rostra, in the most piteous manner, beg pardon for his past misdemeanors, and, if he could not prevail, request of them to grant him at least the government of Egypt. A speech to this purpose was afterwards found in his writing-case. But it is conjectured that he durst not venture upon this project, for fear of being torn to pieces, before he could get to the Forum. Deferring, therefore, his resolution until the next day, he awoke about midnight, and finding the guards withdrawn, he leaped out of bed, and sent round for his friends. But none of them vouchsafing any message in reply, he went with a few

attendants to their houses. The doors being every where shut, and no one giving him any answer, he returned to his bed-chamber; whence those who had the charge of it had all now eloped; some having gone one way, and some another, carrying off with them his bedding and box of poison. He then endeavoured to find Spicillus, the gladiator, or some one to kill him; but not being able to procure any one, "What!" said he, "have I then neither friend nor foe?" and immediately ran out, as if he would throw himself into the Tiber.

XLVIII. But this furious impulse subsiding, he wished for some place of privacy, where he might collect his thoughts; and his freedman Phaon offering him his country-house, between the Salarian and Nomentan roads, about four miles from the city, he mounted a horse, barefoot as he was, and in his tunic, only slipping over it an old soiled cloak; with his head muffled up, and an handkerchief before his face, and four persons only to attend him, of whom Sporus was one. He was suddenly struck with horror by an earthquake, and by a flash of lightning which darted full in his face, and heard from the neighbouring camp the shouts of the soldiers, wishing his destruction, and prosperity to Galba. He also heard a traveller they met on the road, say, "They are in pursuit of Nero:" and another ask, "Is there any news in the city about Nero?" Uncovering his face when his horse was started by the scent of a carcase which lay in the road, he was recognized and saluted by an old soldier who had been discharged from the guards. When they came to the lane which turned up to the house, they quitted their horses, and with much difficulty he wound among bushes, and briars, and along a track through a bed of rushes, over which they spread their cloaks for him to walk on. Having reached a wall at the back of the villa, Phaon advised him to hide himself awhile in a sand-pit; when he replied, "I will not go underground alive." Staying there some little time, while preparations were made for bringing him privately into the villa, he took up some water out of a neighbouring tank in his hand, to drink, saying, "This is Nero's distilled water." Then his cloak having been torn by the brambles, he pulled out the thorns which stuck in it. At last, being admitted, creeping upon his hands and knees, through a hole made for him in the wall, he lay down in the first closet he came to, upon a miserable pallet, with an old coverlet thrown over it; and being both hungry and thirsty, though he refused some coarse bread that was brought him, he drank a little warm water.

XLIX. All who surrounded him now pressing him to save himself from the indignities which were ready to befall him, he ordered a pit to be sunk before his eyes, of the size of his body, and the bottom to be

covered with pieces of marble put together, if any could be found about the house; and water and wood, to be got ready for immediate use about his corpse; weeping at every thing that was done, and frequently saying, "What an artist is now about to perish!" Meanwhile, letters being brought in by a servant belonging to Phaon, he snatched them out of his hand, and there read, "That he had been declared an enemy by the senate, and that search was making for him, that he might be punished according to the ancient custom of the Romans." He then inquired what kind of punishment that was; and being told, that the practice was to strip the criminal naked, and scourge him to death, while his neck was fastened within a forked stake, he was so terrified that he took up two daggers which he had brought with him, and after feeling the points of both, put them up again, saying, "The fatal hour is not yet come." One while, he begged of Sporus to begin to wail and lament; another while, he entreated that one of them would set him an example by killing himself; and then again, he condemned his own want of resolution in these words: "I yet live to my shame and disgrace: this is not becoming for Nero: it is not becoming. Thou oughtest in such circumstances to have a good heart: Come, then: courage, man!" The horsemen who had received orders to bring him away alive, were now approaching the house. As soon as he heard them coming, he drove a dagger into his throat, being assisted in the act by Epaphroditus, his secretary. A centurion bursting in just as he was half-dead, and applying his cloak to the wound, pretending that he was come to his assistance, he made no other reply but this, "'Tis too late;" and "Is this your loyalty?" Immediately after pronouncing these words, he expired, with his eyes fixed and starting out of his head, to the terror of all who beheld him. He had requested of his attendants, as the most essential favour, that they would let no one have his head, but that by all means his body might be burnt entire. And this, Icelus, Galba's freedman, granted. He had but a little before been discharged from the prison into which he had been thrown, when the disturbances first broke out.

L. The expenses of his funeral amounted to two hundred thousand sesterces; the bed upon which his body was carried to the pile and burnt, being covered with the white robes, interwoven with gold, which he had worn upon the calends of January preceding. His nurses, Ecloge and Alexandra, with his concubine Acte, deposited his remains in the tomb belonging to the family of the Domitii, which stands upon the top of the Hill of the Gardens, and is to be seen from the Campus Martius. In that monument, a coffin of porphyry, with an altar of marble of Luna over it, is enclosed by a wall built of stone brought from Thasos.

LI. In stature he was a little below the common height; his skin was foul and spotted; his hair inclined to yellow; his features were agreeable, rather than handsome; his eyes grey and dull, his neck was thick, his belly prominent, his legs very slender, his constitution sound. For, though excessively luxurious in his mode of living, he had, in the course of fourteen years, only three fits of sickness; which were so slight, that he neither forbore the use of wine, nor made any alteration in his usual diet. In his dress, and the care of his person, he was so careless, that he had his hair cut in rings, one above another; and when in Achaia, he let it grow long behind; and he generally appeared in public in the loose dress which he used at table, with a handkerchief about his neck, and without either a girdle or shoes.

LI. He was instructed, when a boy, in the rudiments of almost all the liberal sciences; but his mother diverted him from the study of philosophy, as unsuited to one destined to be an emperor; and his preceptor, Seneca, discouraged him from reading the ancient orators, that he might longer secure his devotion to himself. Therefore, having a turn for poetry, he composed verses both with pleasure and ease; nor did he, as some think, publish those of other writers as his own. Several little pocket-books and loose sheets have come into my possession, which contain some well-known verses in his own hand, and written in such a manner, that it was very evident, from the blotting and interlining, that they had not been transcribed from a copy, nor dictated by another, but were written by the composer of them.

LI. He had likewise great taste for drawing and painting, as well as for moulding statues in plaster. But, above all things, he most eagerly coveted popularity, being the rival of every man who obtained the applause of the people for any thing he did. It was the general belief, that, after the crowns he won by his performances on the stage, he would the next lustrum have taken his place among the wrestlers at the Olympic games. For he was continually practising that art; nor did he witness the gymnastic games in any part of Greece otherwise than sitting upon the ground in the stadium, as the umpires do. And if a pair of wrestlers happened to break the bounds, he would with his own hands drag them back into the centre of the circle. Because he was thought to equal Apollo in music, and the sun in chariot-driving, he resolved also to imitate the achievements of Hercules. And they say that a lion was got ready for him to kill, either with a club, or with a close hug, in view of the people in the amphitheatre; which he was to perform naked.

LIV. Towards the end of his life, he publicly vowed, that if his power in the state was securely re-established, he would, in the spectacles which he intended to exhibit in honour of his success, include a performance upon organs, as well as upon flutes and bagpipes, and, on the last day of the games, would act in the play, and take the part of Turnus, as we find it in Virgil. And there are some who say, that he put to death the player Paris as a dangerous rival.

LV. He had an insatiable desire to immortalize his name, and acquire a reputation which should last through all succeeding ages; but it was capriciously directed. He therefore took from several things and places their former appellations, and gave them new names derived from his own. He called the month of April, Neroneus, and designed changing the name of Rome into that of Neropolis.

LVI. He held all religious rites in contempt, except those of the Syrian Goddess; but at last he paid her so little reverence, that he made water upon her; being now engaged in another superstition, in which only he obstinately persisted. For having received from some obscure plebeian a little image of a girl, as a preservative against plots, and discovering a conspiracy immediately after, he constantly worshipped his imaginary protectress as the greatest amongst the gods, offering to her three sacrifices daily. He was also desirous to have it supposed that he had, by revelations from this deity, a knowledge of future events. A few months before he died, he attended a sacrifice, according to the Etruscan rites, but the omens were not favourable.

LVII. He died in the thirty-second year of his age, upon the same day on which he had formerly put Octavia to death; and the public joy was so great upon the occasion, that the common people ran about the city with caps upon their heads. Some, however, were not wanting, who for a long time decked his tomb with spring and summer flowers. Sometimes they placed his image upon the rostra, dressed in robes of state; at another, they published proclamations in his name, as if he were still alive, and would shortly return to Rome, and take vengeance on all his enemies. Vologesus, king of the Parthians, when he sent ambassadors to the senate to renew his alliance with the Roman people, earnestly requested that due honour should be paid to the memory of Nero; and, to conclude, when, twenty years afterwards, at which time I was a young man, some person of obscure birth gave himself out for Nero, that name secured him so favourable a reception from the Parthians, that he was very zealously supported, and it was with much difficulty that they were prevailed upon to give him up.

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